

The Hermeneutics of Critical Buddhism

JOSEPH S. O'LEARY

Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō, the inaugurators of Critical Buddhism (= CB), have assumed the most elevated responsibility that scholars of religion can incur. They are reformers, recalling a tradition to its central, orthodox line of development and purging it of accretions that have covered over this central truth. What they are doing is reminiscent of what Luther did for Christianity, when he rediscovered the Pauline vision of justification by faith and tested the entire tradition against it, or what Heidegger did for the Western metaphysical tradition in recalling it to its forgotten ground in a contemplative thinking of being. Whereas many scholars of religion want to reduce their subject matter to a branch of anthropology, dismissing any concern with the truth of religious claims, CB seeks to raise religious studies to the Buddhist equivalent of a "theological" level, something many scholars of religion would see as a betrayal of the founding charter of their discipline. The friction is acerbated by the absence of a confessional Buddhist science comparable to church-sponsored Christian theology, so that Buddhist scholars have to put their faith on hold when they enter the academy, disguising themselves as objective historians of religion.

According to Dan Lusthaus, when the Chinese rejected Hsüan-tsang's presentation of Indian Buddhist ideas, "East Asian Buddhism returned with deliberateness and passion to its own earlier misconceptions instead of returning to the trajectory of Indian Buddhism from which it believed it had been spawned" (B 35). CB, armed with the Sanskrit and Tibetan sources of original orthodox Buddhism, takes on the gigantic task of correcting this heterodox bend in the tradition. Since it is nothing less than "the inevitable revisiting of a theme that has been central to Buddhism since its onset" (B 30), CB has ac-

O'LEARY: CRITICAL BUDDHISM

cess to a commanding vision, commensurate with the central concerns of the tradition, and is to this extent properly equipped for its reforming task. A challenge having such deep historical roots suggests the possibility of a vast and thorough recontextualization of East Asian Buddhism.

But the vision and the potential revolution are largely obstructed by methodological inadequacies. The drastic position CB has taken up needs to be tempered. Protest and polemic need to flower into a more fecund art of criticism. I write the following essay as a request for a second wave of CB, which will more fully release the transformative energies of tradition and of scholarly questioning of tradition. The first wave, defined by the manifestos of the movement—Hakamaya's *Hongaku shisō hihan* (1989) and *Hihan Bukkyō* (1990) and Matsumoto's *Engi to kū* (1989)—has perhaps petered out. I am not aware that their more recent philological labors on Yogācāra, Dōgen, and Tibetan Buddhism bring a development of their position. If they have, the following remarks may apply only to the more youthful Hakamaya and Matsumoto. The mixed reactions to their work can be sampled in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree* (1997). Whether the debate has been carried farther in the Japanese literature I do not know.

Purging Buddhist History

That a religious tradition should undergo “theological” reevaluation is not only salutary; it is inevitable as long as the tradition is alive at all, particularly in the case of a tradition itself born as a critical reforming movement within Indian religion. Religious traditions are subject to subtle corruption, to forgetfulness of their initial vision, and a diagnosis of such corruption is essential to the theological task. Protestantism has a whole gallery of diagnostic labels to discern the errors of Catholicism, even in the New Testament where “early Catholicism” already begins to make its fateful appearance. Catholicism has been equally sensitive to deviations suggesting a “Protestantization” of the faith. And all branches of Christianity inherit the patristic “medicine chest” (Epiphanius) of diagnoses: Gnosticism, Docetism, Marcionism, Modalism, Montanism, Arianism, Macedonianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Monotheletism, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and many more. Such labels can take on a life of their own, producing a hermeneutics of suspicion which functions as an ideological weapon. The equivalent medicine chest in Buddhism would center on the disease defined by the Buddha himself, the ignorance and craving that projects a substantial permanence onto the self and dharmas. Religious diagnosis is applied not only to the irreligious worldling but first and foremost to religious visions that fail in their salvific task, such as the *ātmavāda* of Brahmanism and its recurrences in subtler forms within Bud-

dhism itself.

CB sees the majority of Buddhists as having forgotten or betrayed orthodoxy by falling back into *ātmavāda* or what Matsumoto calls *dhātuvāda*, “a substantialist monism in which the Buddha-nature is the sole foundational reality out of which apparent reality is produced” (B 181). This heresy is found in Abhidharma (which spatializes time; E 28), early Mahāyāna stūpa veneration (B 400), Yogācāra, Chinese Mādhyamika, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, the *Kegon Sūtra* (where time disappears altogether), the Tathāgatagarbha literature, Mikkyō and Tibetan tantrism, Lin-chi and other Taoist-influenced Zen essentialists down to D. T. Suzuki, Nishida and the Kyoto school, Umehara Takeshi (a favorite whipping-boy) and all other representatives of Japanism, Watsuji Tetsurō, Ui Hakuju, Hirakawa Akira, Nakamura Hajime, and a host of lesser Japanese Buddhologists. The pillars of orthodoxy are few, and even they have to be purified: they include (1) the Buddha, except insofar as he compromised his message with older ways of thinking: “Śākyamuni himself, by including the practice of dhyāna with its aim of suspending conceptual thinking, introduced an element into Buddhism that fundamentally denies the wisdom that is the very goal of Buddhism” (B 244 = Matsumoto 1994:4); (2) the Pali sutta texts, except where corrupted by *ātmavāda* and Indian conventions; (3) the earlier stages of the Prajñāpāramitā literature; (4) the Lotus Sūtra: contrary to what Nakamura Hajime claims, its teaching that all sentient beings will attain buddhahood is innocent of the later tathāgatagarbha substantialism (E 4–5; B 168–9; note that in the diagram on B 169 the arrow should be a non-identity sign); (4) Nāgārjuna and the Prāsaṅgika version of Mādhyamika down to Tsong-ka-pa; (5) Chih-i; (6) Dōgen in his later writings, which are purified of his earlier dabbling in *hongaku shisō* (the Tendai ideology of original enlightenment).

In weeding out heresy it is easy to make a misdiagnosis that is perpetuated and becomes a heresy in turn. CB’s attitude to indigenous Indian and Chinese influences recalls Marcion’s bid to strip Christianity of all elements of Judaism. Marcion’s attempt to isolate a “canon within the canon” is the narrowest in Christian tradition. CB’s reduction of authentic Buddhist tradition to a very few texts that are pure and above suspicion is almost as radical. Against the hermeneutic generosity of textual history, which constantly stifles new revolutionary insights, Hakamaya wants a critical sifting of the good texts from the bad ones that conceal them (Hakamaya 1992:191).

For CB the essence of Buddhism is “the twelve-membered chain of dependent arising as taught in the *Mahāvagga*, which I [want to] believe to be the twelvefold chain of dependent arising that Śākyamuni pondered in its forward and reverse order, and to the truth of which he was awakened” (B 165 = E 1, translation modified). This is conceived of as a clearly expressed conceptual

doctrine, stable throughout Buddhist history, though ignored more often than not. Matsumoto accepts that the twelve-membered formula is a late, composite formulation, but nonetheless stresses, as a matter of belief, that it must have formed the content of the Buddha's enlightenment (E 22). Satori is seen as a non-religious expression (E 52), for the Buddha's enlightenment has nothing to do with mysticism or ineffable intuition; rather it is the attainment of a correct intellectual vision of the real. Similarly *nirvāṇa* must be purified of indigenous Indian notions of "extinction" and "cessation" and be reinterpreted in a distinctively Buddhist style as an "uncovering" of the truth of dependent co-arising, even though the philological arguments for this are confessed to be inconclusive (E 5). Matsumoto affirms these beliefs in resistance to scholarly objectivists, who are too cautious about expressing definitive judgments. In reality, he claims, scholarship is essentially subjective; objective study is only a stage on the way to final subjective understanding (E 78).

He rejects Tamaki Kōshirō's view that the dhamma is an abiding reality encountered in immediate intuition as an ineffable "pure life, without form" (E 58) and that all Buddhist teachings are merely skilful means, fingers pointing to this changeless moon. "But what has this beautiful language to do with the Buddha's bitter words: impermanence, non-self, suffering?" (E 59). He rejects also Nakamura's thesis that the theory of dependent co-arising is later than and independent of the Buddha's enlightenment experience (E 52), and he queries Nakamura's claim that the verse-portions are the oldest passages in the early suttas and reflect the priority of an ineffable enlightenment experience over its subsequent articulation in doctrines (Nara 1992:44). In opposing those who break the connection between the Buddha's enlightenment and dependent co-arising (E 14), Matsumoto shows an orthodox instinct. To sever *dhyāna* from *prajñā*, enlightenment from insight into dependent co-arising, is as subversive of Buddhism as to sever the divinity from the humanity of Jesus is for Christianity. But then the question arises: does not CB itself threaten this unity by playing down the importance of *dhyāna*? We will also have to ask if history obligingly substantiates the unity postulated by dogma, or whether, both in the Christian and the Buddhist cases, the historical facts have to be construed in light of orthodoxy, forcing them at times to yield the answers dogma demands.

Freeing Buddhist Realism from Mystical Corruption

The combination of an acute existential sentiment with a distaste for anything savoring of the mystical is quite reminiscent of the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, as is the dramatic polemical tone of the debate CB has launched. As Ōe Kenzaburō and many others have lamented,

Japan today does not have a rich culture of discussion and argument. Scholars stifle their criticisms of predecessors in the name of "peaceful coexistence" (E 17). When they do take a critical stand, they tend to be shrill and confrontational. CB's excesses reflect frustration with its cultural environment, what it sees as a deeply rooted aversion to argument and concept among Zen practitioners and Japanist ideologists. Remembering how unfair the dialectical theologians were to their liberal predecessors, I prefer to take most of CB's broadsides with a grain of salt.

Hakamaya and Matsumoto put their own personal lives in the forefront of their writing; diary excerpts, reminiscences, and circumstantial day by day accounts of their scholarly activities abound. This strategy of personalization gives their critical presence maximum impact. Matsumoto believes in a "religious time" irreducible to spatialized or logical terms. Thus his essay on dependent co-arising (E 11-97) takes the unorthodox form of a series of dated entries. Dissatisfied with the accounts of duration and intuition in Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, he turns to the only other Western philosophical text he recalls reading, Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, finding there a more genuine religious temporality (E 15). Similarly, Hakamaya rejects Taoism as a return to animal existence, and opts for the 'younger' sense of dependently arisen temporality lived by Confucius, which is cleanly defined by causal connections, in sharp contrast to the blurry theories that have detemporalized and thus eliminated Buddhist causality in East Asia (Hakamaya 1992:96).

Against Watsuji and Ui, who make dependent co-arising a spatialized, simultaneous mutual interdependence, and against Hiraakawa, who speaks of it as a general principle, Matsumoto insists that the doctrine makes no sense except in terms of religious time, marked by causal sequence, direction, and irreversibility (E 4). Against the totalizing cosmic language of Kegon Buddhism, he stresses, with Kierkegaard, that we live on a narrow path of subjective temporality, a temporality of crisis (E 34). But is a Kierkegaardian model of temporality really suited to Buddhism?

Matsumoto accuses scholars of religion, including himself, of lacking faith and a consciousness of sin (E 19). He expresses shock at an account of the principle of dependent co-arising that would make the Buddha merely its discoverer, and sees this as a sign of diluted faith (E 47). He seems to be pressing Buddhism into a Christian mould, wanting to make the Buddha a savior figure similar to Jesus. He treats the Buddha's word as Christian biblicists treat the word of Scripture: "If Buddhism were only substance (principle) or ineffable experience (satori), our capacity or incapacity to express it in language would be a big issue. But the language in question here is the Buddha's word, which is Buddhism itself. This word, already given to us from the Buddha, is not an

O'LEARY: CRITICAL BUDDHISM

article we can alter at our convenience. . . . Not a phrase or a letter may be altered; there is no alternative to simply accepting it in faith. In religion 'language' means the Buddha's word, God's word, not the self-willed word of humans" (E 56). But is it not misleading to present the word of the Buddha as a dogmatic one, demanding the submission of faith, rather than an instrument for awakening insight?

All appeals to mysticism, mental concentration, satori, "pure experience" (Nishida) are overruled by the authority of the Buddha's word. This is reminiscent of Brunner's sharp opposition of "mysticism" and "the Word" in his attack on Schleiermacher, a strategy rejected by Barth, who better appreciated Schleiermacher's sensitivity to the human and historical mediations of the biblical word. It looks as if the influence of Christian radicalism underlies Matsumoto's emphasis on dependent co-arising as the *articulus stantis et cadentis Buddhismi*. If the succession of dharmas in religious time is truly non-substantial, then the account of the law operative in them should not have the stability and fixity Matsumoto claims for it. The teaching of dependent co-arising should be as fluid, subtle, existential as the phenomenon to which it would awaken us. If one must draw on Christian models, then it should have the dialectical suppleness of Luther's doctrine of justification. But perhaps Matsumoto is moving in this direction.

For CB all thought is conceptual and any effort to set conceptual thought in a wider context is caricatured as a flight from reason. Thus Heidegger's phenomenological ontology is seen as the "antithesis" of the authentic philosophical tradition (Hakamaya 1994:11). Heidegger is presented as seeking a hidden background in the metaphysical tradition exactly as Yogācārā hermeneutics seeks the hidden background of the two earlier turnings of the dharma-wheel (in the Buddha's first sermon and in the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras). Here Hakamaya falls into the same "sokkuri da!" mentality that he criticizes in syncretists and comparatists. Heidegger's return to the phenomena was not a quest for a hidden background, but the rediscovery of what lay close to hand. Similarly, in Buddhism, Zen is not the quest for esoteric insight, but a matter of attending to the suchness of impermanent dependently co-arising phenomena. Some would argue that Yogācārā similarly represents a cleansing of the Buddhist mind rather than the discovery of a hidden substantialist foundation.

Pre-conceptual contemplative thinking, such as Heidegger practices, does not imply a contempt for concepts and language, as Hakamaya's dualism forces him to think. Zen, of course, lies open to the same misunderstanding, and Hakamaya does not hesitate to cut off this limb which scandalizes him. Zen is not Buddhism! Matsumoto rejects pre-verbal experience and ineffability (Nara 1992:44). The indigenous Indian system of *dhyāna* or yoga is wrong-

ly glorified by Zen. For the Buddha it was used only as a means to the end of *prajñā*, which consists essentially in intellectual consideration of dependent co-arising, not in a *dhyāna*-style cessation of thinking. "I see Zen as synonymous with the cessation of conceptual thinking, its aim being to induce the suppression of thought. If this is true, and if we grant the obvious point [!] that wisdom is the fruit of conceptual thought, then the only conclusion we are left with is that Zen thought is the negation or rejection of wisdom" (B 243 = Z 3). Yamaguchi Zuihō defines the "perfection of wisdom" in even more starkly intellectualist terms: "To cultivate firm intellectual convictions regarding the supreme truth, and thus to overcome ordinary human substantialist thinking" (B 236). This author reduces phenomenality to the conceptual: the "state of the phenomenal world can be inferred, and on the basis of this inference treated as logical knowledge" (B 235).

Against such reductionism, I would object that *nirvāṇa* is more than insight into the twelvefold chain of dependent co-arising; it is the breaking of the chain, the realization of a condition beyond dependent co-arising. Intellectual *prajñā* does not suffice to achieve this release; the conversion of the mind must be followed by the more difficult conversion of feelings and instincts, and *dhyāna* is an essential weapon in this task. *Dhyāna* separated from *prajñā* is blind and falls into *ātmavāda*; but *prajñā* which is not actualized in *dhyāna* is empty and effects no real transformation of the agent. *Prajñā* cannot be formulated in a final, definitive way; every formulation has to be sustained by *dhyāna*, by a contemplative *Stimmung*, to retain its spiritual significance as a skillful means pointing to ultimate truth. *Prajñā*-formulations are always context-dependent, and *dhyāna* may push for their revision in accord with a new context, insofar as *dhyāna* alerts one to the conventional fabric of all formulations and keeps alive the tension between conventional and ultimate truth. But *prajñā* deconstructs *dhyāna*'s absolutism in turn, recalling it to the world of empty dependently arising convention, to acceptance of the provisionality of any contextual formulation.

Sallie King points out that a merely theoretical grasp of dependent co-arising is "impure *paratantra*" (B 188); only in an intuitive grasp of the "thusness revealed by the dual emptiness of person and things" (B 184), before the differentiation of subject and object implicit in theoretical thinking, does one break through to purified *paratantra* (*pariniṣpanna*); the latter is not an extra dimension added by Yogācāra for substantialist purposes but a deepening of the vision of dependent co-arising that brings out its phenomenological force. "Emptiness also is form and not apart from it. One returns very solidly to form, remembering its emptiness, but recognizing it as the totality or fullness of what is" (King 1991:106). Matsumoto would reply that such "non-discriminatory cognition (*nirvikalpa jñāna*) that transcends even the distinc-

O'LEARY: CRITICAL BUDDHISM

tions between subject and object" (B 243) has no basis in early Buddhism. Nāgārjuna used the expression once (MMK 18.9); Matsumoto claims that *nirvikalpa* here has not an affirmative sense, yet it is used to denote along with "quiescence" and "absence of mental fabrications" the nature of "suchness"—all of which accords very well with the standard Buddhist understanding Matsumoto would like to subvert. In any case, he claims, Nāgārjuna's lack of caution launched the fateful career of nondiscriminating cognition in Yogācāra and in later versions of the text of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras; it is not found in earlier versions as reflected in the Chinese translations (E 240–5). One might reply that such nondiscriminatory cognition is implicit in the early Buddhist accounts of *dhyāna*, much as the idea of *Śūnyatā* is. That it was not immediately made explicit has perhaps to do with a relative lack of philosophical sophistication in early Buddhism. What Cardinal Newman would call the "idea" of the religion took time to unfold. In any case, Matsumoto would then regard it as a yogic seed of corruption present in Buddhism from the start. It is rather hard to argue with CB, since it has discredited most of the bases in Mahāyāna and even in early Buddhism from which the argument could start.

The Disparagement of Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutics of Disparagement

Religion is self-criticism. But it is not only criticism: the criticism is at the service of a radiant vision, to be accepted in contemplation. In focusing excessively on criticism and in reducing Buddhism, as well as philosophy (B 62 = HB 13), to criticism, CB develops a hermeneutic that cannot do justice to the contemplative aspects of Buddhism, or to the phenomenological ground of philosophy, neither of which are reducible to conceptual clarification. Since CB is dismissive of the very idea of hermeneutics, writing off centuries of hermeneutical reflection in the West as a betrayal of Western reason, it misses the degree to which its own positivistic and rationalistic stance is itself a hermeneutical investment. One forgoes sophisticated hermeneutics only under pain of falling into naive hermeneutics. Mountains of erudition cannot save CB from this fate. A critical confessional thinking has nothing to fear from hermeneutical sophistication. It must even flirt with the abyss of relativism if it is to do justice to the historical conditions in which orthodoxy is fashioned and develops. Barth, the great orthodox theologian of this century, understood this so well that he often reads as a deconstructionist *avant la lettre*. It is to be hoped that CB may yet attain the plateau of Barthian subtlety where it can deploy its potential more fully.

Matsumoto sees hermeneutics as opening the door to Jain perspectivism and to postmodern relativism. To accept a pluralism of interpretations within

a religious tradition is nothing other than relativism. He sees the breakdown of Christian absolutism in the West as having plunged Western culture into relativistic confusion. Religions must be absolutist, he declares. Orientalists, disillusioned with Western rationalism, plunge into reckless relativism (Nara 1992:41–2). Here a hermeneutist would differentiate: at the core of religious experience is an absolute reality, which is indubitable; the doctrines of religion share this absolute quality; but they are always enunciated in the language and horizon of a given epoch and culture, and this dimension of religion is intrinsically relative.

One may welcome the critique of a “folk Buddhism” which holds that “Buddhist doctrine is of no value or at best only of formal value, thereby uncritically absolutizing the base of religious consciousness shared by the Japanese ‘masses’ ” (B 358 = E 101). Nonetheless Japanese folk religiosity is of value as a practical contextualization of Buddhist doctrine, though monastic Zen culture, for example, may be a higher and more orthodox realization. The social and practical context CB envisages for its pure Buddhist doctrine is not well-defined; constant utopian protest would not be a sufficient embodiment of Buddhist wisdom.

Lacking a comprehensive hermeneutic frame of understanding, Matsumoto is prone to textual fetishism. Any use of *ātman* or *attan* or even of language suggesting such associations (as in Lin-chi) suffices to convict its user of substantialism. Thus the word *attan* in the Sutta-Nipāta is read as a relapse into Indian *ātmavāda*. Such a method could disqualify any Buddhist found guilty of using suspect expressions such as “I” or “self.” Sallie King shows that the Buddha-Nature Treatise (T No. 1610, 31.787–813) uses substantialist language as a skillful means and vigilantly subordinates it to Buddhist convictions about dependent co-arising and emptiness. *Ātman*-language can be used in a consciously non-substantial sense: “the supreme not-self that is the perfection of self” (T 31.798c11–12, quoted B 178). “Ontologically, universal *anātman* is the final word; but linguistically and strategically, another word—a positive word—needs to be added” (B 179). Such flexibility offers a justification for the pluralism of Buddhist tradition and spares it from the painful amputations CB proposes.

But can language be divorced from its natural associations? Is the notion of skilful means invoked here to whitewash a betrayal of Buddhist non-self? As Sadagata Akira remarks in a pop CB attack on substantialist Yogācāra language: “If you’re slightly worried, just stick on the label, THIS IS NOT A SUBSTANCE, and no one will complain” (Sadagata 1990:140). The issue of the validity of substantial language as a skillful means is perhaps one that cannot be brought to rest, and that invites us to constantly renewed critical engagement with the classic texts. Such endless questioning is not a betrayal of deci-

sive faith, as CB thinks, but the climate in which faith grows in understanding.

For CB, frequent use of the term "emptiness" is not enough to place one above suspicion. Indeed, it invites suspicion, for emptiness turns out to be the subtlest enemy of dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising, Matsumoto argues, was increasingly occluded by emptiness as the Prajñāpāramitā tradition developed. Interpretations of Nāgārjuna have stressed emptiness, missing the point that the deconstructions offered in the first twenty-five chapters of the MMK serve only to clear the ground for the consideration of dependent co-arising in the twenty-sixth chapter. This chapter seems an anti-climax, offering only dull Buddhist doctrine. But to grasp this doctrine correctly is to enjoy *prajñā*, the highest blessing of Buddhism.

The most remarkable example of CB's textual fetishism is the authority ascribed to the 12-fascicle text of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* by Hakamaya. This text offers elementary instruction in dependent co-arising, rather an anti-climax after the dazzling paradoxes of the 75-fascicle text. But for CB precisely this basic teaching is the deepest wisdom, and must be prized higher than Dōgen's earlier writings, inspired but tainted. There is a puritanical chill in the air in the 12-fascicle text, with its warnings against errors of doctrine and discipline. The poetic vision of the great texts such as "Buddha-nature" is in abeyance. The same chill pervades CB, in its reduction of Buddhism to a lean critical regime, an incessant dismantling of temptations to *ātmavāda*. Dōgen's teaching that impermanence is Buddha-nature, a teaching that has both a strong critical thrust and a liberating impact, is amputated in CB, which purges the Sōtō master's language of references to Buddha-nature, so that only impermanence (dependent co-arising) remains. Dōgen may have been alarmed by his disciples' enthusiasm for the quietistic overtones of his *hongaku* thought, and like St Paul been forced to turn his attention to elementary morals to ward off antinomianism (Putney 1996). But there is no reason to believe that this meant jettisoning his earlier thought. Dōgen specialist Carl Bielefeldt rejects the philosophical reductionism and the *senchaku* (selective) approach that disauthorizes most texts of Buddhist tradition, and its corollary that those who accept such texts are rejected as non-Buddhist. He speaks of "the 'Protestantization' of the dharma that weeds out the rich overgrowth of art and literature, myth and ritual, and in the process cuts off most possibilities for being Buddhist."

Another way in which CB compensates for the lack of a subtle hermeneutic is by its recourse to stark dichotomies which cut violently across the texture of history. Hakamaya opposes critical thinking to topical thinking, that is, any philosophy which tries to "place" rational, logical discourse in a larger context. But Vico promoted the method of *inventio* as a preparation for and con-

text of critical thinking (see Miner 1998), just as for Aristotle rhetoric is not the opposite of dialectic, but its counterpart. Hakamaya simply portrays Vico as anti-critical and explains thereby Vico's recent popularity in Japan. "After Descartes had gone to all the trouble of extracting the method of 'philosophy' out of the antiphilosophical traditions of Europe, why must we once again return to this antiphilosophy?" (B 61 = HB 12). But Vico is a forerunner of the hermeneutical tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and many others, which has long been integrated into the critical thrust of European thought.

Such attempts to rip apart what history has sewn together show an impatience with the processes of *Verstehen*, identified with "the idea that final judgments are to be ever postponed" (B 166 = E 1). Impatience facilitates a rush to judgment. Thus Hakamaya admits not having read Nishitani Keiji, but a glance at a few pages suffices to assure him that Nishitani is much the same as Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (whose "slovenliness" angers him), and a proponent of what Paul J. Griffiths identifies as an "esoterist-triumphalist position"; and in any case the political blindness of the Kyoto School discredits it (HB 242). The hermeneutic grid of CB hardly prepares it to appreciate the rationality of the kind of phenomenological thinking pursued by Hisamatsu or Nishitani. Hakamaya applauds Griffiths's *jejune* criticism that Nishitani does not offer logical demonstrations of his claims (HB 241). But as Heidegger would say, much can be "shown" that cannot be "demonstrated."

Hakamaya admires Griffiths's rather wooden insistence on "demonstration and logical proof as the proper mode of interreligious dialogue" (B 59), and he sees the resistance of other Western scholars to Griffiths as due to contamination by Japanese woolly thinking (HB 221-47). Griffiths turns the tables on historians such as Lambert Schmithausen who have contested Hakamaya's narrowness and Cartesian rationalism by portraying them as Weberian positivists, infected by the "self-congratulatory superiority so evident in the works of Weber himself" (B 151). But Weber was far too aware of Kant, Nietzsche, and Dilthey to be called a positivist. Pique at his negative prognoses about religion and his denial of scientific status to theology leads Griffiths to dismiss as a fatuous boast the "trained ability to look at realities of life with an unsparing gaze, to bear these realities and be a match for them inwardly" (Weber 1996:367) which Weber showed in his scholarship no less than in his political thought. CB trouncings of Weber (HB 93-4, 120-5 = B 113-14, 130-2; E 99-100 = B 356) also undervalue his intellectual subtlety. Weber's ideal is said to be: "Let the facts speak for themselves" (B 130 = HB 121); but what he actually wrote was: "The authentic teacher will refrain from forcing any political stance on his hearer, either explicitly, or through suggestion—the latter being of course the most treacherous tactic, when one 'lets the facts speak for themselves'" (Weber 1922:543). Weber would agree with CB

O'LEARY: CRITICAL BUDDHISM

that objective study cannot replace subjective understanding in matters of religious or political decision; but he embraces the ordeal of objectivity, refusing to make things easy for himself by ideological steamrolling. Weber could have been invoked as an antidote to the right-wing obfuscations which are paraded as "objective" history in Japan (see HB 119 = B 129). But he could also temper the ideological directness of CB, even while understanding that it is a noble reaction to social and historical injustice and an inert and stifling academic culture. John Rex's diagnosis seems applicable here: "Weber is unacceptable to two groups in academic and intellectual life. There are those professional academics who are fearful that they might have to move from their secure social position as technicians and take a wider view of their own society than would be thought respectable or even permissible. For them, the danger in Weber is that he raises the question of value-relevance. On the other hand, there are the ideologues who now, if it is not too strong a word, infest our universities with pure political propaganda. For them, the danger of Weber is his emphasis on value-freedom" (Hamilton 1991:238). Hermeneutical short-cuts underlie CB's disparagement of Vico, Weber, and Heidegger. One is prompted to suspect that the Japanese targets have been given equally short shrift.

For a Critical Ecumenical Historical Pluralism

For CB every text, every doctrine, even every personality, is given a straightforward interpretation and evaluation. There is little room for the discovery of significant tensions and fault-lines in ancient texts, and indeed little sense of how rich and complex these texts are. CB would reject as relativism the view of Peter N. Gregory: "Doctrines never have a simple and straightforward singular meaning but are always multivalent and complexly nuanced formulations that are susceptible to a wide range of interpretive possibilities" (B 290). Gregory does fall into relativism when he dismisses "theological" concerns about truth as old-fashioned, ascribing their re-emergence among Japanese scholars to the influence of Meiji-era Protestantism. I would side with the theological quest of CB against Gregory's rather complacent celebration of the sociological and anthropological orientation of departments of religious studies. To scholars ensconced in historical reflection, who may refuse to articulate, far less assess, the ideological (or "theological") commitments that guide their research, a critical ferment coming from one of the heartlands of Buddhism may serve to relaunch thought (as opposed to the mere history of thought).

"Dogma or doctrine is only one aspect (and not necessarily one to be privileged) of the complex and many-faceted phenomenon we refer to as 'Buddhism'" (B 294). Here again Gregory flirts with a positivistic historicism. The

status of doctrine cannot be read off from the results of historical, anthropological observation. Granted that it may not be what is of first importance in Buddhism, may even be only a skillful means, nonetheless the Four Truths (with dependent co-arising as part of the second truth) and the teachings of impermanence, non-self, emptiness, are surely entitled to a place of privilege. If one substituted "science" or "philosophy" for "Buddhism" in the above quotation, Gregory would be an advocate of ultra-Feyerabendian irrationalism. "A pragmatic approach to truth according to which doctrines have only a provisional status" (B 295) is too soft an account of the epistemic claims of the Buddhist dharma. Gregory stresses the pluralism of early Buddhism, but to the point of complete scepticism about the content of the Buddha's teaching. Between this and CB's obsession with pure origins, a middle way of trust in the tradition can be mapped. Simply to give up as hopeless the problem of identifying the Buddha's teaching is a facile retreat from "theological" hermeneutics, just as is Matsumoto's fideistic claim that it is the scholars' fuss about objectivity that has created the problem. Even if the Buddha were an absent origin, this would still pose a question to be wrestled with "theologically." Gregory thinks that the *Aṭṭhakavagga* in the *Suttanipāta* rejects the idea that there is a right view, along with the possibility of formulating "truth" in propositional form (B 296). Between this and CB's rejection of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* as a substantialist corruption lies the Buddhist middle way of non-attachment to views.

A doctrine that baffles attempts at black-and-white judgment is *hongaku shisō*. Gregory is happy to see it reproblematised, but wants a more flexible and historically conscious method of assessing its various uses. To dismiss anyone who bathes in the atmosphere of *hongaku shisō* as non-Buddhist is unjustifiable. *Hongaku* functions differently in China from what CB leads one to expect; it served as a bulwark against antinomianism in China. In Korea, too, as Muller and McFarlane point out, *hongaku* did not have negative political effects and did not inhibit critical thinking. Moreover, "for Tsung-mi and the textual and doctrinal tradition from which he drew, *hongaku* was tied to a positive valuation of language and thus cannot be understood as entailing an authoritarian denial of the validity of words and concepts as Hakamaya charges" (B 289). Muller likewise criticizes the monist interpretation of Taoism in CB, and points out that Chuang-tzu and Lao-tzu never discredit discursive thought (contra D 91). The conclusion to be drawn is that one cannot evaluate a tradition a priori; it is necessary to see how a teaching works in specific contexts, taking an integral view, with due attention to the performative soteriological intention of the teaching.

Theology asks a lot of history, and history more often than not disappoints its demand. If dogma declares that the twelvefold dependent co-arising is the

O'LEARY: CRITICAL BUDDHISM

essence of Buddhism, then as a matter of logic it must have been present from the start, at least implicitly, whatever the historical record shows. If Buddhism is essentially criticism, even though this is "not principally a historical thesis, but rather a critically normative philosophical thesis" (Griffiths, B 158), nonetheless it requires substantial embodiment in exemplary historical figures such as the Buddha himself. But in the end theology may be forced to tolerate a gap between the clarity of dogma and the murkiness of historical facts, or to adjust the dogma to fit the facts (as the Christian resurrection-faith is rephrased when historical criticism reveals the largely mythical texture of the resurrection narratives).

CB, insofar as it fails to see the gap between its own simple yardsticks and the unending complexity of history, courts a blindness to history, laced with what Heidegger calls "blindness to being." The uprooting of dogma from its historical context goes hand in hand with an uprooting from its contemplative context. Dogma is no longer seen as a fragile and always incomplete historical product, serving as a skillful means to be rethought and redeployed in changing contexts; instead it enjoys a self-sufficient conceptual clarity which makes it the unchallenged master of every life context or historical context to which it is applied. Here the humbling and liberating lessons of centuries of Western theological hermeneutics have gone unlearned.

For my part, I do not believe that a religious tradition has a single essence that can be delineated in canonical formulae. Rather, a great religion is a tradition animated by a spirit or an "idea" which forges its way through history, and finds a great variety of expressions. Any canonical presentation of the religion's vision—be it the Nicene Creed or the Four Noble Truths—has a strategic function within a historical context. In subsequent use the canonical formula will accrue new functions or may even need to be replaced by a new formula that gives better strategic expression to what is central in the idea of the religion. This historical process of a religion's self-presentation is never a tidy one. It has rough edges and inconsistencies that can never be ironed out. The purism of CB, like classical Protestant efforts to isolate the "essence of Christianity," cuts across the texture of history and curbs the creative potential of the pluralism endemic to history. Just as there is no monolithic true Buddhism, neither is *Tathāgatagarbha* thought or *hongaku shisō* a monolith; all these traditions have been and will be subject to ongoing modification.

Origins are not always privileged over subsequent developments, for it takes time for the full meaning of a religious innovation to unfold. Because of this, and of the changing intellectual contexts, we may expect there to be unresolved contradictions between early and later Buddhism, as in Christianity. Sometimes these contradictions will be a challenge to the legitimacy of later developments; sometimes the later developments will put the presuppositions of

the earlier context in question; sometimes the relation between incommensurable mental frameworks will place us in a situation of undecidability. Indeed, our relation to the entire previous tradition is marked by this mutual challenge and frequent undecidability, which both frees us for, and obliges us to, a new construction of Buddhist or Christian truth. That the past dies, that the present is flimsy and provisional, that we must "walk into the future backward" (Valéry), is the texture of historicity, and it is just what dependent co-arising would lead one to expect.

History is impure, and it prescribes that there will be an irremediable pluralism and relativism at the origin even of the most commanding traditions. Religions are historical formations, and are exposed to just the same plurality and inconsistency as other traditions, that of philosophy for instance. In attempting to reduce Buddhism to a masterable orthodoxy CB invests in a myth of pure origins which modern historical consciousness has eroded. Buddha's framework was fully shared by his hearers and his message made perfect sense to them. But now it is archaic and an acculturation of the message is required, a dynamic equivalent of its impact in the old framework. Translation is required.

All religions need to be demystified and demythologized; they need to shed archaic mindsets which undermine their credibility and salutary power today. Hakamaya seems to lack the demythologizing instinct: "I couldn't believe my ears when, in the course of his talk, Fujiyoshi [Jikai] remarked that, 'the Paradise of the Western Pure Land is an *upāya*.' From the time when he was a child gazing up at the sun sinking into the Ariake Sea to the West, he had been raised to believe that his deceased father had gone there, to the Paradise in the West" (B 125). But does Hakamaya himself believe in the Pure Land? Does he believe in the Christian doctrines he accuses liberal theologians of diluting? If not, should he not be happy that demythologizers have come closer to truth? In any case, Fujiyoshi's proposal is not a bolt from the liberal blue; it resonates with tendencies in Pure Land tradition (Ippen), just as Bultmann draws on the spiritualizing hermeneutics of Paul or John. But of course CB would see Ippen as corrupted by ideas of *hongaku* and Buddha-nature.

In an age of religious pluralism, criticism will push all religions to temper or recontextualize their claims. Sometimes the critique may link up with a delicacy and subtlety in older formulations that was lost when they hardened into dogmatic slogans and scholastic assumptions; sometimes the later formulations may be the ones that show greater finesse, and criticism will build on them rather than reverse them; sometimes it is the entire tradition that has to be sublated to a more refined level. Given all this, a critical retrieval and overcoming of tradition has to adopt a principle of hermeneutic charity, ready to find and forgive deficiencies even in the most orthodox strands and to seek out

O'LEARY: CRITICAL BUDDHISM

the wisdom buried even in the most heterodox. Instead of assessing and dismissing traditions on the basis of a few suspect expressions, such a hermeneutics would set the traditions in dialogal interaction.

Confucianism can be deployed as critique of Taoism, Buddhism as critique of Hinduism, and basic contradictions between the rival traditions may be identified. But the critique is also likely to work both ways. All religious traditions exist in a deconstructive ferment as their "idea" interacts with extraneous elements which may enhance or damage it. The mutual deconstruction of Hebrew and Hellenic in the woof and warp of Christian tradition is paralleled by similar tensions within East Asian Buddhism between its Indic origins and its Sinicization. Hakamaya rejects the possibility of a mutual deconstruction between Zen and Pure Land, between Christianity and Buddhism, between the kinds of Buddhism he opposes and those he treasures. The fecundity of religious pluralism, and the greatness of the spiritual task of interpretation it presents to all religious seekers, are completely missed if one sees it only as a headache for orthodoxy and for clear thinking. The higher pluralistic vision is not just a lazy tolerance; it is a rigorous search for the full context within which religious and philosophical contradictions emerge, and which puts these contradictions in perspective.

Rather than insist on orthodoxy in a condemnatory style, or dismiss it as an irrelevance (Gregory), what is needed is a Buddhist ecumenism, in which critical debate between the various styles of the religion is reopened, allowing the Indian sources to challenge anew the Sinitic traditions, but also allowing these traditions a critical voice, so that no tradition is allowed to bask complacently in its own truth but is consigned instead to constant dialogal give and take with the others. Such a hermeneutic will expect to find within Zen and within Tathāgatagarbha thought a recurrence of the constant battle between enlightened insight into dependent co-arising and the temptation of substantialism (which includes the hardening of Buddhist wisdom into a view). The critical vision will ramify as it lodges intimately in the traditions it engages. The *bodhi* tree, instead of being lopped, will be rerooted in truly open dialogue between the mutually interdependent and dependently co-arisen traditions, which have served over centuries as effective channels of *bodhi*.

REFERENCES

- B = HUBBARD, Jamie, and Paul L. SWANSON, eds. *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.
E = MATSUMOTO Shirō (1989). *Engi to kū: Nyoraizō shisō hihan* [Dependent Co-arising and Emptiness: Critique of Tathāgatagarbha Thought]. Tokyo: Daizō Shup-

- pan.
- HB = HAKAMAYA (1990). *Hihan Bukkyō: Critical Buddhism*. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan.
- BIELEFELDT, Carl. "Buddha Nature, Buddha Practice: Reflections on Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*." <http://www.buddhism.org/zen/koan>
- HAKAMAYA Noriaki (1989). *Hongaku shisō hihan* [Critique of Original Enlightenment]. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan.
- (1992). *Dōgen to Bukkyō* [Dōgen and Buddhism]. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan.
- (1994). *Yuishiki no Kaishakugaku* [Yogācāra Hermeneutics]. Tokyo: Shunjūsha.
- HAMILTON, Peter, ed. (1991). *Max Weber: Critical Assessments 1*, volume IV. London and New York: Routledge.
- KING, Sallie (1991). *Buddha Nature*. State University of New York Press.
- MATSUMOTO Shirō (1994). *Zen shisō no hihanteki kenkyū* [Critical Studies on Zen Thought]. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan.
- McFARLANE, Stewart. "Nature and Buddha-nature: The Ecological Dimensions of East Asian Buddhism Critically Considered." <http://www.buddhism.org/zen/koan>
- MINER, Robert C. (1998). "Verum-factum and practical wisdom in the early writings of Giambattista Vico." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59:1.
- MULLER, Charles. "Innate Enlightenment and No-thought: A Response to the Critical Buddhist Position on Zen." <http://www.buddhism.org/zen/koan>
- NARA Yasuaki (1992). *Budda kara Dōgen e* [From Buddha to Dōgen]. Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki.
- PUTNEY, David (1996). "Some Problems in Interpretation: The Early and Later Writings of Dōgen." *Philosophy East and West* 46:4, pp. 497–531.
- SADAGATA Akira (1990). *Kū to muga*. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- WEBER, Max (1922). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- (1994). *Political Writings*, ed. P. Lassman and R. Speirs. Cambridge University Press.