

## BOOK REVIEWS

deserves to join the small but growing number of works that should grace the bookshelves of those interested in Japanese Buddhism.

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***RATIONALITY AND MIND IN EARLY BUDDHISM.*** By Frank J. Hoffman. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987. xii + 128 pages, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 81-208-0211-X

Professor Hoffman's work is, he says, one that operates at the interface between philosophy of religion and buddhology, taking as its raw material the Buddhism of the Pali *Nikāyas*. By this he means that he wants to gain "sympathetic understanding of what is internally coherent and linguistically precise in the language of the . . . texts studied" and to pay "attention to Asian thought from a critical philosophical point of view" (p. 7). Certainly, the main thrust of the book is philosophical: it is perhaps best understood as an application to early Buddhism of some of the methodologies and substantive conclusions developed by anglophone philosophers of religion since about 1930.

Hoffman treats a somewhat miscellaneous collection of issues, including: terms for and ideas about the mental; the thesis that early Buddhism is a kind of empiricism; problems involved with *anattā* and rebirth; and problems involved with describing *nibbāna* as the "deathless" (*amata*). In the first three chapters (pp. 1-45) he deals with methodological issues, theses that, if taken seriously, would make his approach ineffective or inappropriate. He first rejects the thesis that it is improper to restrict attention to the Pali *Nikāyas* without considering the later exegetical and commentarial tradition, and stresses (quite properly) that one can understand the *Nikāyas* as a self-sufficient body of literature

He then considers whether the Buddhism of the *Nikāyas* is unintelligible in virtue of systematic offences against the 'principle of contradiction'. Hoffman nowhere makes quite clear what he intends by this principle; some remarks suggest that he intends to include the principle of excluded middle, others that he does not. But his main point is that the apparent contravention of this basic logical principle (a principle that is at least a condition upon all meaningful discourse) in the third and fourth lemmas of the tetralemma used so frequently in Buddhist texts, is not in fact a contravention at all. This is because logic is

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not at issue in the application of the tetralemma. Rather, Hoffman claims, the tetralemma is a heuristic device, applicable in debate, and aimed at disallowing utterances that do not hang together in some imprecisely defined sense. There is much to be said for this view. Certainly, the Buddhism of the *Nikāyas* show no interest in (what Western philosophers mean by) formal logic, and it is also correct that the use of the tetralemma does not issue in unintelligibility. So all of his major points here are defensible. His restatements of the four alternatives, though, is less happy. For example, to formulate the second alternative *there exists an x such that y does not but z does apply* (p. 21) ignores the fact that what is represented here by *y* and *z* is frequently a pair of contradictories in the Pali (i.e., . . . *y* does not but *not-y* does . . .). This fault also infects Hoffman's restatement of the third and fourth lemmas. There is also the point that there are many other possible ways of interpreting the tetralemma than those canvassed by Hoffman, perhaps the most promising of which is through the logic of empty subject terms. But perhaps it is better simply to say that the *Nikāyas* show no interest in such matters, and that their use of the tetralemma does not make what they have to say unintelligible.

The third methodological issue with which Hoffman deals is that of Buddhism's pessimism. He gives a sensitive, thorough, and accurate sketch of the semantic range of the term *dukkha* in the *Nikāyas*, characterizing it as both descriptive and evaluative. He rejects the simple and misleading claim that Buddhism can properly be called pessimistic simply on the grounds of the first noble truth.

Having cleared the ground and established that the Buddhism of the *Nikāyas* can properly be studied rationally, Hoffman proceeds to do so by analyzing the question of mind and rebirth. He stresses the importance of continuity-without-identity in defending the coherence of ideas about rebirth without there being a substantive reborn person, and offers some illuminating comments in this context on the absence of a developed *kṣanavāda* in early Buddhism (here following Kalupahana). But he surely goes too far when he suggests that the idea that one needs a "mysterious sort of metaphysical rubber band" (p. 57) to hold the aggregates together and to individuate one stream (*santāna*) from another rests upon a misunderstanding of the Buddhist position. For if this is correct it follows that the metaphysical machinery later Buddhists developed to deal with this question—*bhavāṅga*, *prāpti*, *ālayavijñāna* and the rest—manifests a misunderstanding by Buddhists of their own tradition. And one should always, *a priori*, be suspicious of claims by an outsider to understand the implications of a given tradition better than those for whom it provides meaning and nourishment.

This reviewer is in much sympathy with Hoffman's contention that early Buddhism provides no answer to the question of what criteria might be ap-

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plied to determine trans-life personal identity, and with his assumption that this is because belief in multiple lives acted as a background assumption for early Buddhists, and was not yet a matter for serious philosophical debate. But much more could and should be said about the philosophical possibilities for developing such criteria, especially those “closest-continuer” causal theories stated and argued for by many anglophone philosophers in the last two decades (e.g., Robert Nozick and Derek Parfit). It really won’t do any longer to limit the discussion to the criteria of memory and bodily continuity, as though these are the only possible candidates for establishing trans-life personal identity.

In his fifth chapter (pp. 79-101) Hoffman explores the question of whether the problem of trans-life personal continuity can be established by appeal to what he calls the “Buddhist empiricism thesis” (that is, the view adopted by Jayatilleke, Kalupahana, et al., that all the philosophical claims made by early Buddhism are capable of empirical verification). Hoffman offers a clear and decisive rejection of the Buddhist empiricism thesis, exploring as he does so the epistemological significance of faith (*saddhā*), and of the supernormal insights and powers (*abhinñā*) gained as the adept approaches Buddhahood. Hoffman argues that the Buddhist empiricism thesis should be rejected in favor of a neo-Wittgensteinian view of religious knowledge: he suggests that early Buddhism had no set of propositionally-expressible religious doctrines which they thought either capable of or in need of verification, and that one should expect this since religious knowledge never has propositions as its object (see especially pp. 95-98). This descriptive thesis about the nature of religious knowledge in early Buddhism is probably largely correct—much more nearly so, certainly, than the empiricist view; but the universal thesis about the nature of religious knowledge needs much more argument than Hoffman gives it. A proper decision would require the development of a position on the vexed question of the nature of belief and its objects, something that Hoffman does not begin to undertake in this work. But his central point, the rejection of the descriptive thesis that early Buddhism was a form of empiricism, stands.

In the final chapter (pp. 103-118) Hoffman devotes attention to the problem of *nibbāna*, and gives extended discussion to A. D. P. Kalansuriya’s and Peter Masefield’s views on the distinction between *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna*. Hoffman usefully characterizes *nibbāna* as the “process of dying” (to *samsāra*), and *parinibbāna* as the “limit of a Buddhist stream of life” (p. 114). To paraphrase Wittgenstein (whose shade haunts this book): *nibbāna*, according to Hoffman, is an event in life and is lived through; *parinibbāna* is not. So Hoffman suggests, early Buddhism suggests (though does not state) that *parinibbāna* is a limit which cannot be spoken about from the other

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side—and this is why no thesis about the Tathāgata's existence after death is affirmed by the tradition.

In conclusion: this book covers a great deal of ground, philosophical and exegetical, in the space of a few pages. Its strength is that it takes its texts with philosophical seriousness. Its weaknesses are two. First, it tries to do too much. The subjects treated in each of chapters 4–6 deserve (at least) a substantial monograph to themselves, and while Hoffman's conclusions are suggestive, they are very far from definitive. Second, a non-propositional view of religious belief is assumed as obviously correct (see, glaringly, pp. 98–99), a view which is in fact far from obvious and is, from the perspective of this reviewer, clearly false. But even with these caveats in mind Hoffman's book is to be recommended: it is exegetically careful, lucidly written, and philosophically interesting. And, in the field of Buddhist studies, a work with any one of these virtues is rare; one with all three should be read with care.

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### ERRATA

The following typographical errors made their way into Steven Heine's "Truth and Method in Dōgen Scholarship" in *Eastern Buddhist* XX: 2. On page 137, line 20, the fourth *kana* from the end of the Japanese sentence should be *o* を rather than *ya* や. On page 138, line 11, the third *kanji* in *muchū-setsumu* should be 説. On page 145, line 23, the second *kanji* in *uji* should be 時. And on page 145, the fourth line from the bottom should read ". . . faithful to the truth. . ."