

## BOOK REVIEWS

***BUDDHISM AND AMERICAN THINKERS.*** Edited by Kenneth K. Inada and Nolan Pliny Jacobson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984. pp. xviii+180. ISBN 0-87395-753

This attractively bound book carries on its front page a photograph of two neighboring islands on a wide sea. The picture forcibly reminded me of a scene in a Dr. Dolittle movie I happened to watch on television not so long ago. Therein the heroes are saved from a cruel death at the hands of the natives of a tropical island by a miraculous happening: the island is joined again with a piece of land it had been separated from, and it is a perfect fit, up to the last nook and cranny—even a few trees that had been split in half become whole again. An apt simile for the meeting of East and West taking place at present? Hardly so. Although two of the essays in the book seem to suggest exactly this, they themselves make me rather think of two blind persons exploring one another's faces with their fingertips, and thereby dreaming their own dreams . . . .

The book offers us nine essays written by people—six Westerners and three Easterners—of widely divergent backgrounds. Still, as far as collections of essays go, it shows a laudable unity of theme and intent. All essays look to Buddhism for possibilities of cultural renewal for the West, while several stress at the same time the conviviality that exists between much American philosophy of recent times and ancient Buddhist insights. In American philosophy, pragmatism gets its share of attention, but all in all process philosophy looms so large that the Introduction can characterize the book as “an effort to use Whiteheadian categories of thought as aides in interpreting the Buddhist orientation to life” (p. viii). In Buddhism, Mahayana philosophy of the Hua-yen variety is especially singled out. While some of the articles are of exceptionally high quality, all are well written and afford interesting reading. They taught this reviewer many things, not the least about American philosophical trends.

A quick review of the individual contributions may now be in order. In the opening essay, “Toward a Buddhisto-Christian Religion,” Charles Hartshorne sketches his own encounter with Buddhism and its stress on in-

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terdependence and process, in the context of his personal dissatisfaction with the Western notions of substance and self-identity (self-interest). Hartshorne's position may be so well known by now that little more need be said about it here. Suffice it to say that he again emphatically states his opposition to the totally symmetrical view of interdependence of the Hua-yen school, Japanese Zen, and the Kyoto philosophers, as incompatible with creativity.

David L. Hall, "The Width of Civilized Experience: Comparative Philosophy and the Pursuit of Evidence," expects engagement by a philosophical elite with Chinese culture—he focuses indeed on the Chinese Taoist-Buddhist heritage—not only to enrich our Western *cultural sensorium* (traditionally dominated by scientific and moral interests) with novel evidences (especially of the aesthetic and mystical kinds), but also to awaken the moribund philosophical enterprise to new life. In his comparative philosophy, he values the early contributions by F. S. C. Northrop and Joseph Needleman, but again looks especially to A. N. Whitehead for guidance. He faults most process philosophers, however, for reducing Whitehead to a neo-classical theologian, with neglect of his mystical view of religion. Important may be his call for rigorous comparative methodologies, with the recognition that comparative philosophy is still in its infancy and "that the development of a comparative methodology is an extended process of tentative and pragmatic evidence which only gradually may approach philosophic adequacy" (p. 20).

In "A Buddhist Analysis of Human Experience," Nolan Pliny Jacobson looks to Buddhism for a powerful ally in the overcoming of the "cultural bind": The strictures of civilization and culture whereby the individuals are forced to "accept their lives, as it were, secondhand," with neglect of their "own original concrete experience." Buddhism is then described as sharing this fundamental concern—"emphasis upon a fulness of experience"—which is said to be strongly present in American philosophy. I am sorry to say that I cannot but feel that hereby all of Buddhism, in its rich variety and strong culture-boundedness, is uniformly painted in the red, white, and blue of the stars and stripes. Would Shakyamuni recognize himself in Jacobson's "need to be faithful to the fundamental creativity of life" (p. 47)?

In a lucid piece of writing, Jay McDaniel ("Enlightenment in Process Perspective") aims at a particular Buddhist-Christian synthesis which he calls "enlightened eschatology": a wedlock of the Buddhist Mahayana's "enlightened attunement to the ways things are" with the Judeo-Christian "eschatological consideration of how things might be." There can be no doubt that the author points here to an extremely important one-sidedness of, and difference between, the two doctrines and that his very intelligent efforts to bring the two to a synthesis in wholeness must be highly applauded.

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However, the costs in traditional doctrines of this insertion of a future-oriented concern with social realities in Buddhism are not counted here; and they might prove exorbitant—something about which Zen, as represented by Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, might not care, but what about the others? McDaniel's analysis of enlightenment in Whiteheadian categories seemed especially enlightening. Still, there remains in me a fear that the introduction of Whiteheadian thought as a "new Abhidharma" to explicate Shakyamuni's intuition might prove equally misleading as the first one.

The next essay is Kenneth K. Inada's "The American Involvement with Śūnyatā: Prospects." In this remarkable essay, which goes most directly to the core of the question formulated in the title of the book, Inada describes śūnyatā as an idea and discipline opening one to the experiential process in all its fulness—in contradistinction with the Anglo-American empiricism with its "prosaic attachment to the empirical nature of things" (p. 74). If this seems to bode poorly for a real encounter of America with śūnyatā and a true American understanding of Buddhism, Inada finds reasons for optimism in the seriousness of Buddhist studies of the younger generation of American scholars, in the concerns of the "whole American pragmatic movement," and most of all in the creative nature of the American pluralistic experience. The author's presentation of śūnyatā as a notion whose potentialities are still open to further exploration, not only by theoretical analysis of its nature, but especially by cultural experience, is refreshing indeed.

David Lee Miller offers us "Buddhism and Wieman on Suffering and Joy." I agree I should feel grateful to Miller for his beautiful introduction of an American philosopher-theologian of whose existence I was not aware until now, but I must confess that my feelings of gratitude are by far overshadowed by my irritation at the arbitrary way the Buddha has been dragged into the picture. I honestly do not see how Wieman's central idea of "creative interchange" with one's fellow humans or Miller's "empirical commitment into the creative foundations of the world" (p. 110) can be called characteristic of the Buddha. And if I must concede that both Shakyamuni and Wieman see an intimate connection between joy and suffering, I am willing to do this only under loud protest that the structure of the relationship looks to me fundamentally different in both cases.

In "Buddhist Logic and Western Thought," Richard S. Y. Chi pleads for a full recognition of the Buddhist logician Dignāga's theory of the sixteen truth functions in Western logic. In view of the central role logic unavoidably plays in the East-West encounter, Chi must be making an important point—which, however, in its technicality, is hard to judge for the layman, meaning this reviewer.

Robert C. Neville's "Buddhism and Process Philosophy" is probably the

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most deeply probing essay in the book. Buddhism appears (as already in a few earlier essays) as “a commanding metaphysical vision of process” (p. 121), and Process Philosophy as a Western way of thinking wherein Buddhism can find a congenial resonance, not unlike it did in Chinese Taoism. Then, however, Neville makes two important points: 1) that a comparison with Process Philosophy cannot cover all aspects of Buddhism; and 2) following Hartshorne, that Whiteheadian creativity and assymetry in the interrelatedness of things are not to be found in Buddhism. After showing how “Nāgārjuna’s refutation of causation and change fails with respect to the contributions of Process Philosophy” (p. 132), he develops the thesis that Buddhist emptiness and interrelatedness do not necessarily imply a rejection of assymetry in causation in the cosmological dimension, while on the other hand its view of perfect symmetry may fit reality in its ontological dimension. This certainly offers ample food for thought.

The collection ends, as it began, with the contribution of an eminent personality; this time Nakamura Hajime’s ideas on “Interrelational Existence.” The interrelatedness of all beings—a theme that runs through all the essays as apparently the main lesson the West must learn from Buddhism—is here brought down to the level of concrete human existence. It is indeed the ethos that pervades a great part of Japanese Buddhism and may well present a powerful antidote against our Western individualism.

I can only hope that this short summary gives some idea of the richness of the book’s contents, although it cannot, of course, do justice to it. If, on the way I have grumbled a bit, it is only because at some points we are offered all too graphic illustrations of comparative philosophy “in its infancy.” Indeed, we do not always seem to be beyond the point yet where we “reconstruct” the partner (*in casu*, Buddhism) in our own image, or rather as the counterpoint of ourselves. In the present benevolent approach this leads to adorning Buddhism with all the virtues we miss in our own civilization; but in its apologetic variety, this same fundamental “*Einstellung*” would come down to putting the other up as the counterfoil of all the strong points we flatter ourselves to possess. The former attitude is, of course, ethically more desirable, but not necessarily more true or more helpful in the long run. It is most probably true that Buddhism must and will change by its encounter with the West (as indicated on pp. xv and 164, note 4), but the fact remains that, if we want to allow the other to be a real factor in our thinking, we must first try to see him as he is, now.

The editors and the State University of New York deserve our gratitude for making these essays available to us in a beautiful form.

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