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Brook Ziporyn. *Being and Ambiguity: Philosophical Experiments with Tiantai Buddhism.* Chicago: Open Court, 2004. xxii + 452 pp. $32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8126-9542-7.

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From Tiantai to Neo-Tiantai: Intersubsuming Western Philosophy

This book philosophizes. It philosophizes by transforming Tiantai Buddhism into a Neo-Tiantai Buddhism which engages with western philosophy, especially modern and contemporary western philosophy. I belong to that minority which affirms that "living philosophy" is one of the things Buddhist Studies should do, and I recommend this book as a brilliant example of such a genre.

In the introduction, and then the first sections of part 1, Brook Ziporyn exposits the key teachings of Tiantai so as to set them up as a springboard for his project, the formation of his Neo-Tiantai. Insofar as his exposition establishes the parameters for all that follows, I here indulge it at some length. In Ziporyn's reading, Tiantai extends the *Lotus S?tra*'s famous claim that ?r?vakas, by denying Bodhisattvahood, are in fact practicing the Bodhisattva path without knowing it (p. 15). Tiantai takes the clue from this collapse of the ends-means relation, by in effect applying it to N?g?rjuna's distinctions between the Two Truths, conventional truth (Buddhism and ordinary speech) and ultimate truth (Emptiness, the "unspeakable") and even to N?g?rjuna's distinction within the mundane between ordinary truth and the false (non-Buddhist religious and philosophical theories).

Tiantai's Three Truths are Emptiness, Provisional Positing (of what N?g?rjuna calls ordinary truth, but also of what N?g?rjuna calls false teachings), and Centrality (reversible as-ness, which Ziporyn shall re-name "Intersubsumption"). Emptiness and Provisional Positing are exactly equivalent, and this equivalency constitutes Centrality, which is reversible as-ness. In Ziporyn's words, "the differentiations between things, their conventional designations, *as well as any cockamamie philosophical or religious theory or personal illusion about them*, are just as ultimately true and untrue as their Emptiness ... both of these aspects are just as ultimate as the fact that these two aspects are simply aspects of one another. This is the interfusion of the Three Truths, which means even Centrality is not more ultimate than the other two. To indicate any of the three is to indicate all three: they are three ways of saying the same thing" (p. 16). Ziporyn calls Tiantai's Three Truths, in "philosophical" terms, Global Incoherence, Local Coherence, and Reversible Asness ("Intersubsumption") respectively, and with refinement from affiliated Tiantai teachings, and some personal "tweaking," these become the engine for what Ziporyn calls Neo-Tiantai. His Neo-Tiantai asserts that identity per se is synonymous with its own constitutive impossibility (p. 39). Any proposition, and indeed any experience, will *at the same time* globalize (make into a whole) and destroy itself, in such a way that these two are one and the same. For example, "To know how to squeeze new meanings out of old premises is to know oneself, for one has no self but this constant, somewhat desperate, and vaguely disreputable rereading and recontextualization of old claptrap." The real truth that is delivered by exegetical ingenuity is that the exegetes are right in spite of themselves, "precisely by being so wrong." They are "getting at the true kernel of the matter by straying so unjustifiably from the 'original meaning', although the true kernel" is not what they believe they see revealed but rather the *very process* of "finding true kernels in old lies" (p. 40). The rest of Ziporyn's four-hundred-fifty-two page book is the application of this Neo-Tiantai formulation in terms of the classical issues of philosophy (with reference as well to John Lennon, Bob Dylan, Woody Allen, Frank Oz, and a host of others).

Part 1 has as its title, "Neo-Tiantai Basics: Enframement, Coherence, and Agency–The Thusness and Otherwiseness of All Coherences," and it is through this suite of *puncta* that the narrative logically moves. I would single out as crucial the progressive exposure of the "Four Ways of Being Thus and Otherwise: Impermanence, Illusion, Tertium Quid, Asness" (pp. 62-73). Compara-

tive philosophers will appreciate, I think, Ziporyn's reference to, and interpolation of, Merleau-Ponty here and throughout part 1. "Impermanence" is a face of Global Incoherence: "Whatever appears in experience will be transcended, i.e., will disappear, will be recontextualized, will assume a meaning other than the one it has appeared *as*." But "Impermanence" turns out to be "Illusion" as a face of Global Incoherence: "Whatever appears *is* transcended already.... [W]herever there is appearance of any coherence there is also necessarily already transcendence of that appearance, the two are necessarily inseparable." But "Illusion" turns out to be the situation of "Tertium Quid": "Whatever appears is *thereby* transcended" (p. 65). The final step is "Asness": "Appearing per se is being transcended per se. To be thus is to be otherwise" (p. 66). The Neo-Tiantai of part 1 permutates the great Tiantai masters, Zhiyi, Zhanran, and Zhili; and engages with Kant and Hegel, Frege, Whitehead, Nishitani, Davidson, and ?i?ek (among others).

Part 2, "Desire and the Self: Towards an Ethics and Psychology of Constitutive Impossibility," includes an extended treatment of ethics. If one applies the notion of Thusness and Otherwiseness to conventional definitions of good and evil, then "the essence of Neo-Tiantai ethics lies in recontextualization, rather than elimination or substitution.... My obsession or compulsion or stupidity or malice may be seen, when the camera draws back to the right distance, as it were, as a point in a curve describing bliss, generosity, health, and so on. The question lies then in how far back the camera is to be drawn. And the implication is that at any level of focus or analysis we may be resting at, it would be possible to push forward and discover that our present figure is made up of plenty of components that are horrible when judged by its standard, and vice versa; there need be no final level at which this process must stop" (p. 287). This formulation may generate a consequence which has been pejoratively attributed by many Buddhists to Tiantai itself: if every behavior is also every other behavior, both good and bad, neither good nor bad, then ethical responsibility loses its motivation. Even soteriological intervention loses its driving force. Neo-Tiantai considers itself immune from this criticism, because one should live one's localized "coherence" very intensely, even while recognizing all other things/events are negatively/positively transcribed into it (and vice versa), but for Tiantai's adversaries, this is precisely the flaw–the immunity tends to vacate moral earnestness.

In particular I recommend to "Continentalists" (scholars working in European philosophy) Ziporyn's treatment of the double-bind (pp. 270-271 et circa), a motif they will recognize from the French poststructuralists, especially Lacan and Derrida. Ziporyn advises that one do what most successfully seems to fulfill, with one stroke ("a single token"), the contrary demands of one's *ad hoc* double-bind (of course, for Tiantai, anything can be a double-bind and anything can be a stroke, depending on one's "focal apparatus"). This localized "solution" is analogous, suggests Ziporyn, to the Lacanian "*objet petit a*, standing as a plug covering the 'stain of the Real', i.e., the crack revealing the inconsistency of the Big Other" (p. 270). The representative problem is ("provisionally," I assume) both satisfied and destroyed–one becomes the problem and hence is free from/as it.

Part 3, "Hermeneutics and Autoerotics: Truths and Other Hidden Parts, and How They Welcome Their Demise," recontextualizes Neo-Tiantai in terms of the Asness between/of erotics and hermeneutics (cf. Nietzsche, Bataille, the Post-Structuralists). Ziporyn is–with one stroke–classically Buddhist (and Tantrist, it seems to me) and philosophically "postmodern French" in his emphasis on the force of desire. In a sexual register, desire is said to be either "solitary" ("onany") or "shared" ("love," here taken to be re-contextualized auto-eroticism). Love as repackaged onany? We are far from the conventional reading of the Bodhisattva vows here! Ziporyn would/could deploy Intersubsumption to simultaneously affirm the conventional reading too, but then the end-result seems to be a flattening of morality again. For the counterpoint of auto-eroticism in hermeneutics, and a romp through academic politics, see especially (and appropriately, according to Ziporyn) the very same pages (pp. 423-426). For Neo-Tiantai's disagreements with Zen, see pp. 408-409; with Levinas, pp. 347-350; with deconstruction, p. 418. "Pragmatically, if we may invoke an old trope, in deconstruction, all is wrong and false, while in Tiantai, all is right and true," says Ziporyn. I demur. In fact, I have shown at some length in my own published work that for Derrida, all is *not* "wrong and false." As for *all* being "right and true," Derrida is Jewish enough to know that is impossible, very impossible indeed.

I close with some words about *Being and Ambiguity*'s style, the high intellectuality of which is laced with a Rabelaisian flippancy very offensive to some. Ziporyn's text is "living philosophy." It *does*philosophy. The counterpoints of Hegel and Lennon, etc., of classical *elenchus* and *double-entendre*, etc., "act out," theatricalize, Neo-Tiantai's principle of Intersubsumption. That is, the text *does*the philosophy.

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