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The early, brilliant books of Jacques Derrida sparked a revolution in the humanities. Their most notable impact in the field of Buddhist studies was in connection with Madhyamaka thought, which suddenly assumed a new look as an ancient form of Deconstruction. I think of Robert Magliola's pioneering 1984 book, Derrida on the Mend (see http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/pdf/221.pdf) and Youxuan Wang's expert study of 2001, *Buddhism and Deconstruction* (see http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/jjrs/pdf/683.pdf). The later works of Derrida, which often focused on ethical issues, did not have the same wide impact. Yet an exposure of Asian ethical thought to the later Derrida deconstructive treatment of ethical categories is a project that imposes itself with a certain inevitability. Just as the earlier Derrida, in Magliola's account, shows up the "logocentrism" of most Asian philosophies, leaving only Madhyamaka and Zen standing, so one will expect the later Derrida to put in question any Asian ethics that seem dogmatic or conventional while vindicating the subtlety of Taoist or Zen ethics. Naturally, the variety of essays in Youru Wang's collection does not match such a simple preconception.

The essays contain insightful expositions of Derrida's thought, early and late, along with illuminating discussions of N?g?rjuna, S?ntideva, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Mazu, Wang Yangming, Wonhyo, D?gen, and Nishida. Most contributors share a concern that must be felt by any ethicist faced with Derrida's talk of the "impossibility" or the "impossible possibility" of decision, justice, friendship, hospitality, giving, and many other virtues, etc., namely, the fear that such talk, whatever it may precisely mean, tends to undercut the authority of solid ethical codes and to induce a moral paralysis, making it impossible to act with confidence. Meditating on the double binds under which ethical responsibility is enacted, Derrida detected that injustice was built into every concrete decision to practice justice. As John Caputo puts it: "If I feed my cat, do I not sacrifice all the other cats in the world who die in hunger?" (quoted, p. 179). The reader may wonder if it is wise to import such worries into the study of Asian ethics, and whether it would not be better to dismiss the later Derrida as one who is making a fuss about nothing, and whose arguments are shown to be hollow by the agonized language they generate, e.g.: "One must decide, though one can do so only in blindness, trembling, tears, and hope" (p. 176); "painful and dreadful aporias" (p. 44).

Recalling how the boost Derrida gave to literary criticism in the 1970s petered out in the 1980s as deconstructionist critics more and more turned into clones of Derrida and Paul de Man, to the point that absorption in Derrida became a pretext for *not* reading the literary texts, one may shudder to find a similar expensive investment now being made in a field where to read the texts is immensely more difficult. The investment in the later Derrida is somewhat less expensive in terms of philosophical difficulty, but it is also less rewarding in terms of intellectual excitement; its impact on the Asian texts is likely to be less potent, but also less liable to distort.

Many of the contributors to this volume elude having to deal with the intricacies of Derrida by simply drawing from him some general deconstructive insights, which prompt them to revisit their subject from a new angle. Classical normative systems are modified, rationalized, and reconstructed as difficult ethical dilemmas emerge over time, as Puroshottama Bilimoria shows for Vedic India. One may call this process deconstruction, but it need not demand analysis in specifically Derridian terms. To be sure, the *Bhagavad-G?t?*'s "decisive reexamination and trans-evaluation of the preceding tradition from the perspective of its less stable (conceptual and social) concerns" (p. 30) does create a complex text of the kind that deconstructionist literary critics enjoy. Indeed, deconstruction could serve to dislodge the text's own basic tendency, if it is true that "the exclusion of the other entailed in the monism and detached morality of the Upanishads surfaces in the epic ethics; this is taken to a new episte-

mological and a-theologic critique, in particular, in the *Bhagavad-G?t?*" (p. 31). The *G?t?*'s ideal of desireless action is seen as deconstructing Vedic orthopraxy or "altarity" and moving toward "the enigma of alterity," in that it is oriented to "the welfare of all being" (p. 34). Deconstructive reading could also solicit the tension between the way the *G?t?* beckons to "the possibility of a discourse of universal human rights" and the restraint and calculation its social context imposed (p. 36).

But of course all texts worthy of the name lend themselves to a deconstructive take of one kind or another, and the deconstructive reading brings out the self-deconstructing aspect of the text. That in itself does not betoken any close affinity with the philosophy of Derrida. Bilimoria's further reflections on Levinas, Gandhi, and Indian law are advanced in the name of "hard deconstructive *thinking* on ethics." They indicate how Derrida has helped us to read texts in a more differentiated and critical way, but also how the lesson of Derrida may be best appropriated, in most cases, by leaving Derrida himself behind.

Douglas L. Berger deals with the quintessentially "deconstructive" N?g?rjuna. He takes chapters 8, 17, and 24 of the *MMK* as a mini-treatise on the Buddhist way to think about ethical conduct. Whereas for Derrida "justice can only be pursued through an overcoming, through a confrontation with the limits of the present law," for N?g?rjuna "one can only realize freedom through the very workings of the social economy itself" (p. 41). I wonder if the *MMK* really implies this coordination of social duty and transcendental freedom, or if the text really tells us anything about N?g?rjuna's concrete attitude to ethical and social issues. The fact that the *MMK* contains no critique of present law proves nothing, since it is not that kind of text. Berger suggests that a Derridian critique of N?g?rjuna might begin here (p. 51). He recounts rather gleefully how Derrida finds aporias and antinomies in such cherished ideals as "equality before the law," claiming that this is in line with "the deconstructive spirit of Marxism" (p. 43). Readers of Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) will know that Derrida's grasp of Marxism is extremely vague, and will suspect him of an opportunistic appropriation, in which abstract paradox replaces the power of concrete analysis and dialectic.

Berger's reading of N?g?rjuna as an ethical thinker depends on a denial that *svabh?va* refers to metaphysical substance; rather, "its real import is moral, because ultimately early Buddhist philosophers invoked *svabh?va* in order to give viable explications of the mechanics of karma, or how our intentions and actions determine our quality of bondage to the world or liberation from attachment" (p. 45). He translates *svabh?va* not as "self-existence" but as "self-sustaining power," "autonomy or self-production"; it is "verbal and causal," not something that entities "have" or "exhibit" (pp. 45-46). I doubt if this is entirely valid: *svabh?va* is a delusive projection and its overcoming is liberation, but nonetheless the arguments marshaled are mainly of an ontological rather than ethical order, and they do invite comparison with Western dismantlings of ontological categories (in Hume, Hegel, and Bradley, not to mention Derrida).

In *MMK* 17, N?g?rjuna "militates against the search for a fixed standard of adjudicating an act, or trades in the hoped-for fixed standard in exchange for a visualization of action that preserves its connection to common-sense notions of causality and the *sensus communis* of appropriate social conduct (*vyavah?ra*)" (p. 48). Berger notes that *vyavah?ra* can mean "legal transaction," so that the reliance of the "paramount aim" (*paramârtha*) on it does not mean reliance on mere convention, as Candrak?rti suggests, but fulfillment of social duty: "the hope for freedom is bound through a sense of indebtedness to the other, and can be gained only through the work of fulfilling one's obligations to the other" (p. 50). "The other," here, sounds like one of those substantive fixations that Madhyamaka is supposed to overcome. I find it unsatisfactory (perhaps due to an ontological or theoretical attachment of my own) to see N?g?rjuna as arguing only on an ethical plane against certain rigidities and dualisms, using metaphors more than logic, and forsaking theorizing for practice.

Dan Lusthaus sees Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu) as "deconstructing moralistic self-imprisonment" and as close to Derrida, for whom "a responsible decision as such will never be measured by any form of knowledge, by a clear and distinct certainty or by a theoretical judgement" (p. 66). But Derrida drops out of sight as Lusthaus goes on to trace origins of Zhuangzi's perspectivism in the Mohist search for standards of ethical judgment, which depends on pragmatic verification of the value of such standards in practice. For the Daoist thinker: "The more the ideal is pursued, the further one travels from what one sought in the first place, until it is totally out of sight. The ideal blinds one to the reality always already available everywhere" (p. 78).

Youru Wang shows how Chan masters defamiliarize the theme of karma. But "no matter how radical they are in deconstructing the reified concept of good/bad karma, the Hongzhou masters never intend to deny karma or the causal chain itself" (p. 88). Mazu's "ordinary mind"

is "a deconstructive mind that privileges neither right nor wrong … it is non-clinging, non-abiding, and free-flowing," overcoming fixated notions of karma and thus cutting off the creation of bad karma (p. 89). Aware of the limits of moral norms, it goes with the flow, in compassionate responsiveness. "Its ethics is aporetic and unusual but more profound than, if not canceling out, normative ethics, since it provides a foundationless foundation for such ethics" (p. 94). One might ask to what degree Derridian categories, rather than those of ordinary pragmatism, need to be invoked for the philosophical clarification of this outlook?

For Gereon Kopf, Nishida's non-dualism has an affinity with Derrida's *différance*; the play of absence and presence in the "trace" evokes Nishida's "dialectic of affirmation and negation" (p. 137), which is a "systematic subversion with postmodern tendencies" (p. 138), in that he sees philosophy as "an infinite process of transformation that is located in the present and marks the transition from the present to the present." However, Nishida is a deconstructionist of a rather mild sort, since he remains "committed to the modernist project of constructing a systematic philosophy of universals" (p. 139). He deconstructs in the key of *coincidentia oppositorum* when he says that "god includes its own self-negation," and that "the self, wherein god is reflected, constitutes the self-identity of the absolute contradictories of good and evil" (p. 141). Kopf treats "daemonic" and "demonic" as synonyms, thus imposing a Satanic overtone on ideas of Goethe, Nietzsche, and Nishida; he regrets that Nishida was not more non-dual about the demonic and did not talk of "demonic-and-yet-angelic" (p. 144). If Nishida thought that evil was only daemonic, and not demonic, then his deconstructive identification of good and evil is only a pantomime; if he thought that Satanic evil was identical with the good, then I suggest that his cult of unification needs itself to be deconstructed.

The study of Asian thought requires a high degree of methodological lucidity and a comprehensive and disciplined perspective. In airing the suggestions that emanate from the later Derrida for this project the contributors to the present collection have done a service to the advancement of the field, but they may also have shown that the yield to be expected is not very great. Some diluted the tension of Derrida's way of thought, which seeks to abide in an aporetic situation that can never be dissolved. They tended to reduce deconstruction to a stable doctrine on "the devoid-ness of the self-nature of a being, when identity is understood as non-identity" (Jin Y. Park, p. 202) or to see it as a stage to ulterior stability: "One cannot reconstruct anything without deconstruction" (Y. Wang, p. 1); "It is our lives that most need to be deconstructed and reconstructed" (David Loy, p. 113). Naturally one can use Derrida in this way, but a Derridian of strict observance would say that if deconstruction issues in a reformed ontology or ethics it has lost its aporetic quality and thus canceled itself out.

Other contributors gravitated to Emmanuel Levinas, or drew on themes in Derrida that are already in Levinas, as if feeling that Asian ethical wisdom was more likely to gain in power and persuasion by dialogue with this great ethical thinker than by being interrogated in function of the later Derrida's rarefied concerns. Levinas, with his insistence on an asymmetric ethic in which one is held hostage by the claim of the other, is the godfather of Derrida's ethical scrupulousness, which has something Talmudic about it. Levinas's own writing became more complex and cryptic in response to Derrida's critiques, so that his ethical scruples were doubled with conceptual and linguistic ones. In turn, Derrida deconstructed these later writings as well, "which is to say that Derrida claims to uncover how Levinasian thought actually works in the later writings, despite the surface-claims of Levinasian discourse" (Robert Magliola, p. 175).

I suspect that Magliola is trying to warn his fellow-contributors William Edelglass and A. T. Nuyen away from the "soft option" of taking Levinas as a paradigm of deconstruction. Nuyen identifies the Daoist *wuwei* (taking no action) as that primordial situation of ethical responsibility that Levinas called "a passivity more passive than all passivity" (p. 170). "Interestedness has to be deconstructed and the way to deconstruct it is to be responsible for others without consciously deciding to assume the responsibility" (p. 173). It seems that the word "overcome" or "renounce" could suitably replace "deconstruct" here. Edelglass finds a resemblance between Levinas and S?ntideva in that both see "the moral significance of deconstructing one's own concepts" (p. 160). He says that Derrida "remains at the conventional level" (p. 159), by which I suppose he means that Derrida's labors in the field of language are not guided by the Buddhist ideal of ultimate truth. He does not make the same remark about Levinas, and he does not explain why one would have to see Derrida as less deeply concerned with "the absolutely Other" than Levinas is. But irrespective of whether the notion of "deconstruction" is deployed in a consistent way in this volume, or whether it becomes just a peg on which to hang a variety of divergent explorations, the work is a significant contribution to bringing discourse on Asian ethics into vibrant interaction with Western ethical philosophizing, and as such it must be gratefully welcomed.

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