

# H-Net Reviews

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William Edelglass, Jay L. Garfield. *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. xix + 457 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-532817-2; \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-532816-5.

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## Buddhism as Philosophy?

*Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings* is a much-needed contribution to the teaching and study of Buddhism. It is a judiciously selected and excellently translated sourcebook of primary texts and—through the detailed, nuanced, and scholarly up-to-date systematic and historical introductions to each section—a valuable introduction to the rich variety of culturally and philosophically diverse Buddhist approaches to questions of existence, language, knowledge, mind, and ethics. The primary task and value of this anthology is to make the philosophical dimensions of Buddhist forms of thought more accessible to students and Western-oriented philosophers. By clearly and effectively presenting Buddhism as a varied and rigorous tradition of inquiry, of questioning and reflection, this book will encourage more care and precision in approaching Buddhism as philosophy.

This collection is particularly significant given suspicions concerning the very idea of Buddhist philosophy, which at times is overly marginalized within philosophy (by restrictive definitions limiting philosophy to modern or Western thought stemming from Greece), within Buddhist practice (if practice is taken as inherently anti-intellectual), and within Buddhist studies (if questions of the validity and truth of argumentative and interpretive strategies and claims are excluded). This work balances such one-sided tendencies by revealing Buddhists themselves—from Buddhism's Indian beginnings through its Central and East Asian transformations to the con-

temporary world of cross-cultural encounters and pressing moral issues—to be engaged in reflection, argumentation, and interpretation (logic and hermeneutics) and attentive to issues concerning being (ontology or metaphysics), knowledge (epistemology), the mind and the person (philosophical psychology), and morality and society (ethics and social-political philosophy).

As William Edelglass and Jay Garfield indicate in their introduction, Buddhist philosophy needs to be approached in its own terms as it has its own point of departure and concerns: the fact of the pervasiveness of suffering and the possibility of liberation through experientially knowing one's condition; the path of liberation proceeding through practice, meditation, and insight into the basic interdependence, non-identity, emptiness (of an unchanging inherent essence), and transience of existence. This shifting point of departure poses challenges that Buddhists have addressed in a variety of ways. These differences and contradictions have produced a rich history of lively dialogue and debate, attention to the logic of arguments, and the development of proposals of how things work and skepticism concerning them. The latter is an important issue that might lead some to begin with part 3 on epistemology.

The editors prioritize Buddhist discourses about being by placing metaphysics at the beginning, and they and the contributors do not fully address Buddhist skeptical strategies that might be considered neutral to meta-

physical claims or even anti-metaphysical. This issue is striking in Noa Ronkin's introduction to chapter 1, where the Buddha's hesitation about making ultimate metaphysical claims is described as process metaphysics and no-self (*anātman*) as a process self. Ronkin's introduction and selections show how the Buddha might be interpreted as a process metaphysician and Theravādin thought as being driven from an early process to a later event metaphysics. This portrayal is notable when contrasted with an alternative approach such as that offered by Peter Harvey in chapter 23. There the Buddha is seen as more of a skeptical and diagnostic experientialist and Theravāda Buddhism as being less ontologically motivated and more oriented by epistemic and empirical concerns.

Opening up of different ways of interpreting Buddhist philosophies is possible not only by contrasting chapters by different contributors but in many of the introductions themselves. Garfield's introductions to Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu concisely introduce the reader to the issues at stake in their writings and to alternate interpretations that they have generated. In considering Nāgārjuna's discussion of the two truths, the challenging question of the identity and non-identity of ordinary conventional and ultimate dharmic truth, we are asked to consider whether Nāgārjuna is employing *reductio* arguments without introducing a position or ontology of his own (*prasaṅgika*) or whether he is advocating a different kind of ontology through emptiness (*svātantrika*), i.e., whether emptiness is itself intrinsically empty or the ultimate truth. This becomes a contested issue for philosophical argumentation—involving ontological, logical, and epistemic questions—in the Indo-Tibetan tradition as seen in later chapters concerning Jñānagarbha's approach to two truths as two perspectives on one truth, Mipam Namgyel's argument for extrinsic in contrast with intrinsic emptiness, and Khe-drupjey's argument concerning language and the ultimate that a positionless position is incoherent and reduces Madhyamaka to nothing.

Garfield's account of Vasubandhu likewise—if less effectively given the partiality for the Yogācāra-as-idealism thesis—sets up the question of whether he is advocating idealist ontology or a more experience-driven phenomenology. The following chapters concern Śāntarakṣita's powerful arguments against reifying either the one or the many, and Dushun's Huayan interpretation of emptiness as the non-obstruction of overlapping interdependent perspectives that leads from (1) phenomena to (2) principle to (3) the non-obstruction of phenom-

ena and principle and (4) the non-obstruction of phenomena and the phenomena (the four perspectives or realms of dharmas). Next Graham Parkes introduces Dōgen's "Mountains and Waters as Sutras," where natural phenomena are seen as awakened exemplars teaching the dharma, and discusses the ecological implications of polycentric perspectivism. Chapter 8, on the twentieth-century Japanese thinker Nishitani's integration of Zen and Western philosophical categories, concludes part 1.

Although Buddhists can be imagined to dwell in silence and the ineffable, Buddhists have relentlessly used language, logic, and hermeneutics and have also investigated how they occur and function—as the sections in part 2 make evident. This point applies to Chan and Zen, as Peter Gregory notes of the hermeneutical strategies of classification, argumentation, and polemic, and most skillfully in presenting the Buddhist path through gradients of truth in Zongmi (p. 140); Steven Heine in introducing the importance of language for Dōgen, for whom Zen is not only silence (the marrow) but equally the use of words (skin, flesh, bones) that are an indispensable element of awakening (p.149); and Michael Mohr concerning the use of language and kōans in Tōrei Enji, for whom "words and characters" are both the "source of bondage" and the "source of liberation" (p. 160). In addition to two chapters on language and the two truths, Richard Hayes deftly portrays the mutual irreducibility of sensation and reasoning in Dignāga and his theory of inferential signs. Any unit of language precludes or rules out (*apoha*) other states of affairs rather than making positive assertions that are generalizing and nominal about sensations that are singular.

In Buddhist sources, knowledge is not restricted to theoretical or conceptual cognition and predication, much less to the certainty of a Cartesian subject. Yet it is not inappropriate to speak of epistemology given the empirical and phenomenological tendencies of Buddhism and its concern, which it shares with non-Buddhist Indian philosophy, with "the number and nature of *pramānas* (authoritative cognitive instruments)" (p. 171). Whereas other Indian schools included or primarily relied upon scripture and testimony as sources of knowledge, Buddhists considered universals to be nominal, inference proceeding through universals to be at best an instrument, and only perception and first-person experiential verification to be ultimately valid (p. 172). The early Buddhist tradition can be characterized as promoting an empirically oriented inquiry in focusing on issues of perception, its epistemic primacy and non-conceptual character, efficient causality, and experientially verifying

claims for oneself, as Peter Harvey and Dan Arnold indicate in their introductions to and selections from, respectively, the Theravāda Pali Canon and *Dharmakīrti* and his commentator Dharmottara. The latter not only comments but critically transforms in arguing that knowledge involves more than *Dharmakīrti*'s efficient-causal portrayal. The subsequent *Dharmakīrti* chapter concerns causality in relation to the theory of inference, which here is the study of what conditions and states of affairs must obtain in order to accept a state of affairs.

While the previous chapters elucidate what might be called the empiricist side of Buddhist epistemology, some of the following chapters develop its phenomenological side. This is evident in the chapters on Yogācāra by Dan Lusthaus, Tiantai by Brook Ziporyn, and Dōgen by Bret Davis, whereas chapters 19 and 20 concern the more pragmatic and realist tendencies of texts from the Tibetan schools of Ngog, Sakya, and Gelukpa. Lusthaus's section concerns the Yogācāra composite text, the *Buddhabhūmy-upadeśa*, which examines the perception of awakened beings and how they could "see things as they are" (p. 205). Davis interprets and translates Dōgen in a Heideggerian ontological language of the revealing and concealing of being and "the presencing of truth." The *Genjōkōan* is arguably more about the priority of practice rather than the Western concern for the ontological event of being. Zen is zazen, which for Dōgen lets the fundamental issue of Buddhism be enacted and is itself the way. The Dōgen chapters by Parkes, Heine, and Davis are pedagogically advantageous in allowing readers to contrast different styles of reasoning and interpretation in contemporary Buddhist studies.

Buddhist practitioners and thinkers have developed detailed, rich, and varied traditions of exploring the self, the mind, and the person. Based on its history, it appears that the Buddha taught the notion of *anātman* not to eliminate but to further meditative, empirical-analytic (of "entities" into their aggregates), and phenomenological inquiry into the self and its conditions. For Theravāda Buddhism, as Peter Harvey discusses, the "I" is neither absolute nor nothing but rather its conditions or aggregates. Since the "no" of "no-self" is the emptiness of an absolute essence, constant presencing, or unchanging soul, the self is the aggregated, causally conditioned, suffering self. This basic non-identity creates the problem of how there is enough continuity to speak of basic Buddhist ideas such as karma and the merit and demerit of a person's actions.

A number of chapters will be of special interest to

Buddhist scholars as they correct previous misinterpretations based on recent scholarship. Most notably, Dan Lusthaus introduces and corrects the many misconceptions that Buddhists and scholars have had of the so-called Pudgalavāda, which is a polemical label applied to a number of distinct schools. These "personalists" are older and more mainstream than previously thought and the charge that they maintained an ontological self appears increasingly dubious. Whilst continuing to maintain the basic Buddhist claim of *anātman*, they nominally posited a more robust sense of being a person, which is both reducible and irreducible to the aggregates while not being something beyond them, in order to encourage practice by clarifying notions that "lead to knowledge," such as karma and the cultivation and pursuit of the Buddhist path.

The following chapters include Vasubandhu's critique of the Pudgalavāda approach to the person, his critique of the idea of a permanent unchanging soul (as essence or immortal), Candrakīrti's critique of consciousness, and Śāntarakṣita's investigation of whether individuation requires a self or if the identity of a continuum associated with a causal series suffices. Other chapters concern Zhiyi's Tiantai mutuality of delusion and wisdom, profane and sacred, and the importance of *xin* (heart-mind) as the source of delusion and wisdom and Chinul's response to the remark that mind is Buddha and Buddha is mind. The final chapter is on Nishida's reconceptualization of being a person in the context of Zen and Western philosophy. The first selection is of interest for exploring the relation of Buddhism and nationalism, as Nishida contrasts Japan's Zen-like third way with the overly "rational Indian" and "irrational Chinese" (p. 360).

Even while it is contested whether ethics is a conditional means, integrally constitutive of the path, or simply unconditional, ethics is basic to Buddhist forms of life. Buddhists have lived, enacted, and reflectively considered a variety of moral practices and ethical principles in socially and culturally diverse circumstances, as the readings and comments in part 5 demonstrate. The reality of suffering is a point of departure for ethics, from ancient India to contemporary socially engaged Buddhism, in which the dharma is interpreted as confronting and answering current moral and social-political issues such as the environment, inequality, and violence. In part 5, chapters explore Theravāda ethics; Śāntideva's presentation of the bodhisattva path; the centrality of propriety and ethical self-cultivation, with engagement as a consequence rather than a direct object of concern, in Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi*; Wōnhyo's non-

substantialist Bodhisattva ethics, which considers issues such as what is a vow, and what is violating it, if it has no essence? In Jin Park's second contribution on Korean Buddhism, Wŏnhyo dereifies ethics by showing the levels of interpretations and differentiation of contexts that require a contextual and interpretive yet responsive compassion.

In the next sections, Edelglass considers the current import of Buddhism in the context of and in response to the moral and social problems of the contemporary world, aptly introducing texts by Thich Nhat Hahn on socially engaged Buddhism and Joanna Macy on the conditional as a non-anthropocentric, non-speciest, and ecological self. In the noteworthy final chapter, Karma Lek-

she Tsoma considers the role of women in Buddhism and the paradox that there is a fundamental sense of equality and no theoretical basis for inequality in Buddhism and yet women actually experience subordination, inequity, marginalization, and violence in Buddhist societies and even at times in Buddhist institutions. She responds to this paradox by articulating the complementary roles of Buddhism and feminism in the critique of injustice, inequality, marginalization, and exclusion.

This book is to be highly recommended as an introduction to and sourcebook in Buddhist philosophy, and the editors and contributors should be thanked for providing a valuable resource that exhibits the depth, sophistication, and diversity of Buddhist philosophies.

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