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Buddhisms and Deconstructions (review)

Francis Xavier Clooney

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sion are provided at the end of each chapter), and so one might respond to the challenge by asserting that education, the gradual raising of consciousness in the schooling of the young, is the answer, at least at the level of what scholars, separate from their possible other roles as activists (and some of these writers are also activists) can do. This cultural work of raising consciousness, in which the study of religions centrally includes a focus on the environmental and economic implications of their traditional teachings, is obviously vital, and *Subverting Greed* is an important, helpfully short, contribution to the literature available to teachers. The question does persistently arise, however, of why, if the religions are so unanimous in their teaching of nonmaterialist and thereby anticapitalist values, they have not as yet seemed to have offered any significant resistance to the globalization of capitalism. Of course, liberation theologies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia were significant forces in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and in some cases later as well. But in the twenty-first-century world of incipient eco-collapse in the midst of imperial war, terrorism, and continued economic exploitation of the poor by the rich, the emancipatory voices of the religions have seemed to be drowned out by the voices of worldly forces on the one hand and the global spread of religious fundamentalisms on the other.

*Subverting Greed* presents the religions as important resources for a communal, compassionate, and just global ethico-economic pattern of life. Its writers are skilled interpreters who know their traditions well and are clear and well informed about the realities of the contemporary world situation. These are the religious spokespeople that the socially engaged Buddhists of *Hooked!* (David Loy is the one writer who appears in both texts) must seek out in dialogue if the Buddhist liberation theology they are interested in developing is to have dialogue partners in the wider realm of world religions. But if the writers of both of these collections wish to substantiate the cry of the World Social Forum that “another world is possible” in resistance to the practices of greed that ravage the planet, then the question of social and political praxis must be addressed, responsive to the Leninist question, “What is to be done?”

Brian Karafin  
*Ithaca College*

**BUDDHISMS AND DECONSTRUCTIONS.** *Edited by Jin Y. Park, with an afterword by Robert Magliola.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006. Pp. xxii + 290.

Buddhisms and Deconstructions originated in a panel on “Buddhism, Deconstruction, and the Works of Robert Magliola” at the twenty-second annual con-

vention of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature. Half its essays began as conference papers, while the rest (including several published elsewhere) were solicited for the volume. Implicit too are an awareness of other volumes—for example, Harold Coward's *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* (1990) and (with Toby Foshay) *Derrida and Negative Theology* (1992)—and the conviction that such volumes, although making a contribution, have not adequately sorted out what can usefully be said with respect to that tantalizingly elusive couple, deconstruction and Buddhism.

The volume exemplifies many starting points and avenues for testing the Buddhism-deconstruction relationship, but all of it is clearly mapped. "Buddhism and Deconstruction" (section 1) illumines some basic issues underlying Buddhist-deconstructionist comparisons: "Naming the Unnameable: Dependent Co-arising and Différence" (Jin Y. Park) and "Nagarjuna and Deconstruction" (Ian Mabbett). "Buddhism Deconstructs" (section 2) explores how deconstruction can be analyzed from a Buddhist perspective, and includes "Derridean and Madhyamika Buddhist Theories of Deconstruction" (Zong-qi Cai) and "Indra's Postmodern Net" (David R. Loy). "Deconstructing Buddhism" (section 3), with essays on "Deconstructive and Foundationalist Tendencies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism" (Roger R. Jackson) and "Ji Zang's Sunyata-Speech: Derridean Denegation with Buddhist Negations" (Ellen Y. Zhang), looks in the other direction, still further deconstructing Buddhism. "Chan/Zen Buddhist Deconstruction" (section 4) furthers the critique with another pair of detailed analyses, "The Chan Deconstruction of Buddha Nature" (Youru Wang) and "Sudao: Repeating the Question in Chan Discourse" (Frank W. Stevenson). All these authors stick with cases in order to test the larger Buddhism and deconstruction hypothesis, showing, unsurprisingly, that similarities and differences make comparisons work out in different ways and for different conclusions. It matters which Buddhist tradition is brought into play, how one interprets some particular Buddhist thinker, and (because almost everyone here is thinking of "Derrida" and "deconstruction" at the same time) how someone with Buddhist learning ought to read which early or late essay by Derrida. Altogether, these eight essays illumine specific examples and contribute to the volume's larger topic, as we narrow down and define the Buddhism-Deconstructionism conversation. Loy perhaps speaks for many of the authors here:

From a Buddhist perspective, the post-structural realization that the meaning of a text cannot be totalized—that language/thought never attains a self-presence which escapes differences—is an important step towards the realization that there is no abiding-place for the mind anywhere within Indra's net. But the textual dissemination liberated by Derrida's deconstruction will not be satisfactory unless the dualist sense-of-self—not just its discourse—has been deconstructed. (p. 80)

Or, as Ellen Zhang soberly puts it,

The play of sunyata/denegation implies a movement of thought that sees the surplus of thought, and understanding this surplus sometimes requires the un-thought. The moment of negativity is, therefore, also the moment of construction and creativity. Sunyata/denegation is not simply a nihilistic place of reducing meaning to non-meaning, reality to non-reality. On the contrary, it is the moment of emancipation of meanings, we find in the Chinese traditions from Zhuangzi to Buddhist philosophers and Chan masters. Meanwhile, the experiential dimensions in the process of transforming our thought and consciousness explored by Daoism and Buddhism also offer a possible critique of postmodern discourse. (p. 121)

One could well imagine an entire volume made of just these essays with just such insights.

But there is more. In “Deconstructing Life-Worlds” (section 5), two essays —“The Veil Rent in Twain: A Buddhist Reading of Robert Magliola’s Deconstructive Chiasm” (Jane Augustine) and “Emmanuel, Robert” (Gad Horowitz) —remind us that the volume is indeed a still more complex three-way conversation, including also the writings and personality (evident by the vehicle of an Afterword) of Robert Magliola, a scholar of both Buddhism (which he teaches in Thailand) and deconstruction, and creator of his own unique symbiosis of the two. As Park puts it in her general introduction, “a relationship between deconstruction and the life-world is well articulated in Robert Magliola’s book, *Deconstructing Life-Worlds* (Scholars Press, 1997), in which Magliola deconstructs the double binding of his own life which he sees as a life caught in the double-cross, the chiasm between philosophy and experience, the conventional truth . . . and the ultimate truth, . . . samsara and nirvana” (p. xviii). And Jane Augustine vividly captures the spirit of Magliola’s writing:

Magliola’s brilliant, *sui generis* deconstructive literary style arises from his personal experience of *sunyata*, “emptiness” or “devoidness,” within meditation as distinct from his intellectual encounter with its logic in the Mahayana Buddhist texts. These meditations on the meaning and implications of “emptiness” . . . emphatically deconstruct his Christian theology with its positing of a “real” God as Being, the ultimate essence. Caught in conflict, Magliola therefore interprets the Biblical account of the Temple “veil rent in twain” at Jesus’ death to reveal a “God rent ‘between.’” Symbolic associations to the “rent veil,” the cross of chiasm, the slippery “between,” and Derridean “difference” open up his preoccupations: to stay “between” Buddhism and Christianity, eastern practice and western intellection; to compare Nagarjuna and Derrida; to apply “devoidness” in the reform of Christian doctrine; and to stretch language to show how things “go on.” His intricate, multi-tonal “differential” discourse, *sous rature*, makes a radical new contribution to post-modernist discourse. (pp. 171–172)

Augustine maps Magliola, and Horowitz analyzes him, and together their essays create the strong interpersonal trajectory that Magliola intensifies in his after-

word, giving the whole volume much of its special energy and unusual character.

But still one more angle must be considered before one gets to the afterword. The essays in “Questioning the Self, Questioning the Dialogue” (section 6)—“Sartre, Phenomenology and the Buddhist No-Self Theory” (Simon Glynn), “Self and Self Image,” (Steven W. Laycock) and “Zen Flesh, Bones and Blood: Deconstructing Inter-Religious Dialogue” (E. H. Jarow)—remind us that things could and perhaps should be still more complicated. After all, why would one want to privilege *this* dialogue among *these* versions of Buddhism and some particular version(s) of (largely) *Derridean* deconstruction? Glynn and Laycock, drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre and others, remind us that there are other important starting points for dialogue between Asian and Western thought, and with different advantages. Jarow is more skeptical, in a largely salutary fashion, about whether there can be a dialogue that is not constrained by the religious and cultural agenda of those who set it up.

Jin Y. Park (American University) has done an impressive job in editing the volume, holding together essays and themes that might otherwise fragment off into their own worlds, endlessly more specialized and resistant to arrangement according to anyone else's theme and project. In a solid overall introduction, she puts forward introductory views on Buddhism and its reception in the West over the past several centuries, deconstruction in the context of twentieth-century thought, and then sets up the dynamic of the volume: the sense that many have that deconstruction and Buddhism have similar agendas with respect to essentialism, language and reality, theology, and so on—but yet still that each may find the other lacking—deconstruction as still too connected to the metaphysical tradition (p. xvi) or lacking in religious discipline (p. xvii), or Buddhism itself as ontotheological in some strands in some eras (particularly aside from *Madhyamika*). Perhaps which Buddhism and which strand of Derrida's thought one has in mind will determine whether there will ever be a volume titled “Buddhism and Deconstruction” in a singular, more economical, and more articulate fashion. Park also offers a brief introduction to each of the six parts, and aids readers in making their way through the varied essays. A good index would have rounded off the excellent editorial work that went into this volume.

Magliola's afterword (at thirty-five pages, considerably longer than any of the essays) gives a personal voice and edge to the overall product. He vigorously engages several of the essayists, mainly with respect to *Madhyamika* and in response to particular challenges posed to his own thought. His afterword then is both rather technical—clarifying details in Buddhological disputes—and deeply rooted in Magliola's own persona as deconstructionist, Buddhologist, and Christian theologian. It is a fascinating response to the volume, and gives a flesh-and-blood concreteness to the entire inquiry. But because Magliola does not offer a synthesis or conclusions, it would have been good if Park—so patient and careful and capable—had authored yet one more section of her own commentary, a

concluding set of remarks *after* Magliola's comments. As it is, it is tempting to conclude that the volume is ever on the edge of self-deconstruction; the analysis of "Buddhisms and Deconstructions" might well have proceeded without reference to Magliola's work; Christian theologians might well have engaged Magliola in conversation about Catholicism past and future, without very much attention to Buddhism and deconstruction. But in the end we are probably wise to attest that the conversation is all the more interesting because its components are bound together in what should really be named "Buddhisms, Deconstructions, and Robert Magliolas."

I close with three observations. First, as mentioned, the volume reminds us clearly of the challenges related to making good comparisons without allowing essentialist and ontospeculative theory to predict results before the comparisons are enacted. Particularly the earlier essays in the volume are exemplary in demonstrating how to narrow down comparisons in order to come to a few good conclusions about whether the now familiar "deconstruction and Buddhism" intuition really works once one descends to particular cases. Comparison is not impossible, but it is difficult, always a matter of juggling multiple concerns with respect to history, theme, and mode of comparison. Simply by the fact of this project and its repeated warnings against latent ontotheology, we see that we have a long way to go before comparative projects are freed of the invasive effects of unexamined Western, Christian starting points. My intuition, though, is that we need to learn to be still more specific, paying still more homage to the early Derrida, still more closely reading whole texts, contesting but also yielding to the texts we read.

Second, we can ask how this volume contributes to Buddhist-Christian studies. Cross-readings of Buddhism and deconstruction may indeed catalyze a new linguistic world in which comparative encounters of Buddhism(s) and Christianity(ies) may be more imaginatively written. The contributors' conversation with Robert Magliola and his project in *Deconstructing Life-Worlds* ends by reminding us that "Western Christian" can be (and probably always has been) a complex construction containing as many interesting variables and nuances as any given Buddhist or deconstructionist project. But if so, more needs to be said if we are to factor that more complex understanding of Christianity into a larger "Buddhisms and Deconstructions and Christianities" conversation that does not demonize Christianity in order to liberate Buddhism and deconstruction.

Third, additional follow-up issues will be more particular to other readers, such as this reviewer, who want to use this book as a reminder and guide even while engaging in other kinds of comparative study with other conversation partners. As a Roman Catholic engaged in the study of classical Hindu texts that have a strongly theological, even ontotheological perspectives, I am not only chastened regarding the essentialist, substantialist, and cryptotheological habits of my own writing, but also encouraged, with some relief, to appreciate the solid lineages, lifelong training, and enduring doctrinal claims about real realities and persons that make Hindu and Christian traditions natural con-

versation partners, even friends. Ontotheological foundations—revealed, tried, exonerated—graciously manage to provide deep rooted and fruitful places for learning. Reading Hindu texts through other Catholic and Jesuit eyes, but still with Derridean care and agility, promises to complement and even reconstruct this pioneering *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* and its Magliolan inspiration.

Francis X. Clooney, SJ  
Harvard University

IDENTITY, RITUAL AND STATE IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM: THE FOUNDATIONS OF AUTHORITY IN GELUKPA MONASTICISM. By *Martin A. Mills*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 404 + xxi pp. with 12 black and white plates.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a type of teaching called a *dmard kbrid*, a “red instruction,” wherein the *lama* brings students through a teaching as a physician might dissect a corpse, pointing out and explaining the various parts and organs and their places and functions. In *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*, Martin Mills has done very much the same thing, with the exception that the body he examines is still very much alive, and emerges, to my eyes at least, as a new and wholly vital entity. Mills exposes the subcutaneous and sanguine body of Tibetan Buddhism, the bones and muscles that make up its structure, the blood that flows through it, and the organs that keep it alive, in “a plain and open manner,” just as in a *dmard kbrid*.<sup>1</sup> The value of such a presentation truly cannot be overstated. An attempt to catalog the contents of each chapter would be both impossible and counterproductive, as the wealth of theoretical material and ethnographic detail is a large part of what makes this book so powerful. Instead, I will identify several topics, several of the vital organs alluded to, that are either not commonly noticed in the academic study of Buddhism, or that are given fresh perspective by Mills’s anthropological and sociological methodology, and that are so crucial to understanding how it is that Buddhism lives in a typical Himalayan village. The latter portion of this review explains why I place such high value on this book and its potential place in Buddhist-Christian studies.

*Identity, Ritual and State* is an ethnography of Kumbum Monastery in Lingshed, Ladakh (the eastern half of the Kashmir valley, located in Jammu and Kashmir, India), but its concerns are much more far-reaching than a single remote Himalayan village. The central question of the work is “how we are to understand the nature of religious authority in Tibetan Buddhist monasticism” (p. xiii), although it might more properly be the religious authority of Tibetan