

Peter HARVEY, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995. x + 293 pp. \$47.00 cloth, ISBN 0-7007-0337-3; \$22.95 paper, ISBN 0-7007-0338-1.

Frank J. HOFFMAN and Mahinda DEEGALLE, eds., *Pali Buddhism*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996. xiv + 233 pp. \$42.00 cloth, ISBN 0-7007-0359-4.

John PICKERING, ed., *The Authority of Experience: Essays on Buddhism and Psychology*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997. xviii + 252 pp. \$42.00 cloth, ISBN 0-7007-0450-7. \$22.95 paper, ISBN 0-7007-0455-8.

Paul WILLIAMS, *Altruism and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998. xii + 272 pp. £40.00 cloth, ISBN 0-7007-1031-0.

THE DISCOVERY THAT THERE is nothing corresponding to a substantial self in the constituents of bodily and psychical existence allowed early Buddhism to develop a penetrating and demystifying approach to psychological analysis. But what was radical and illuminating back then is likely to seem a tedious scholasticism now. The precise details of Abhidharma psychology are liable to be dismissed as part of an archaic world-picture. The first three books reviewed here are valiant attempts to retrieve these pristine sources of Buddhist insight both by intensive study of the Pali texts and by a search for the precise phenomenological equivalents of their terminology.

1. Peter Harvey's *The Selfless Mind* is the most penetrating discussion I know of the non-self doctrine in early Buddhism. He refuses to translate anatman as "no-Self" and points out that the early suttas contain no explicit denial of a permanent, metaphysical self (p. 7). This does not mean however that a "true self" is imagined above and beyond the self-less elements in which we seek a support for a delusive ego-identity. Harvey refutes efforts to reintroduce some transcendent ineffable core of personality beyond the empirical phenomena (e.g., PÉREZ-REMÓN 1980). His critique would apply also to the views of Takeuchi Yoshinori, Nakamura Hajime, and other Japanese Buddhists who see the Buddha as "counselling people to find their genuine true Self" (p. 6).

The early suttas neither posit nor allow a substantial autonomous self, no matter how subtly formulated (p. 42). The changing empirical self provides the basis for the projection of the illusory metaphysical self; but since it depends on such a basis the latter's claim to permanence is self-contradictory.

Philosophical denial of a self is not an aim of Buddhism; rather the illusion of self is shown not to apply to any of its supposed objects; everything whatsoever turns out to be non-self. The constant failure of the clutching at self becomes a source of spiritual insight as it is transformed into a practice of letting go. The deconstruction of ego is a source of endless ingenuity, and every argument brings one back to the reality of non-self; for instance, the argument that "anything which cannot have complete power and control exercised over it must be not-Self" (p. 49). These arguments are a practice, like psychoanalysis, not the defense of a speculative view. The process of letting-go is "fuelled by the very ideal of 'Self' which eventually gets burnt away in the process itself" (p. 51). "A bald denial of Self would short-circuit this very practical and self-transforming exploration" (p. 246).

Nibbāna emerges, instead of Self, as the real ultimate goal: it is "the stopping of anything that could allow self-awareness as 'I am' or 'this I am,' essential for Selfhood" (p. 53). In using "Self" as an ideal of perfection against which all empirical phenomena are shown up as non-self, Buddhism skillfully prepares us to welcome the perfection of nibbāna, which is "like a Self in many respects—permanent, blissful, not dependent on anything—though lacking the crucial aspect of I-ness" (p. 246).

The denial of self is not merely an opaque soteriological ploy as argued by COLLINS (1982); to the paradoxical “selfless persons” of Collins’s title Harvey opposes a lucid analysis of “the selfless mind”—the empirical self is centered in mind (*citta*) and its discernment (*viññāna*), and this dependently-coarising reality has no substantial core. An enlightened person is one whose empirical self develops all the more fully in that it is not shackled by the illusions of metaphysical selfhood. When the Buddha’s disciples are praised as having a great self (p. 56), this is not a relapse into *ātmavāda* (as “critical Buddhists” are quick to claim), but signals simply that they are living fully and freely in wisdom and compassion. “When a person lets go of everything, such that ‘his’ identity shrinks to zero, then *citta* expands to infinity. Whatever one grasps at and identifies with as ‘I am’ limits one” (p. 62).

Empirical personality is “a flux of causally-related states” (p. 65). It provides a sufficient basis for the functioning of karma in the successive rebirths of the same personality. Even here, where Buddhism is saddled with myth and where it is often supposed to fall into self-contradiction, Harvey powerfully vindicates the coherence of the non-self teaching. The mechanism of rebirth turns on discernment, which seeks support in the objects with which it is preoccupied, thus returning to an unliberated existence. But the attainment of nibbāna also turns on discernment. Nibbāna is nothing other than “objectless, unconstructed discernment” (p. 227).

Around these central themes the author masterfully elucidates many knotty points of early Buddhist psychology. Of interest to students of Japanese Buddhism is the observation that “the Buddha-potential, a key concept of the Mahāyāna, has links to both the ‘early Suttas’ and to the later Theravāda” (p. 176).

2. Hoffman and Deegalle’s *Pali Buddhism* offers several instructive philological essays and a number of opinion pieces, some of which shed interesting light on current Sri Lankan thinking.

George D. Bond examines two formulations of the ten precepts. The better known list has external faults, such as intoxication and accepting gold and silver, as the fifth to ten precepts; the other, possibly older list has instead: slander, harsh speech, frivolous talk, covetousness, malevolence, wrong view. The latter list has been taken up by reformists in Sri Lanka as more suitable to the laity. The gradual and flexible approach to the ethical path in Theravāda is reflected in a distinction between the general monastic standard of the first list and a higher, supramundane morality reflected in the second. Laity were expected to observe the first five precepts of the first list, with a view to worldly happiness and a good rebirth. The precepts of the second list are “integral to the path because they constitute crucial links between outward actions and the inner goal of spiritual purification” (p. 36), and effectively overcome the three unprofitable (*akusala*) roots, hatred, greed, and delusion. Indeed, the last three precepts, against covetousness, malevolence, wrong view, are the three profitable roots “seen under a different aspect” (p. 41). “The arahant is defined as one who has eliminated the unprofitable roots and lives fully in the profitable ones” (p. 42); thus the precepts take one to the heart of Buddhism. Hence the indignant rejection Michael Carrithers

met with when he proposed to forest monks that meditation should be put in first place and then the precepts would make sense (p. 40).

Andrew Olendzki divides the twelve factors of dependent origination into two sets. Nibbāna brings to an end the first set: ignorance, craving, grasping, and their negative results, becoming, birth, decay, etc. Only at parinibbāna are the other factors extinguished: “admitting that all twelve factors of the *patīccasamuṅṅga* cease with enlightenment would amount to denying consciousness (*viññāṇa*), feeling (*vedanā*), and perception (*saññā*, *phassa*) to the arahants, and even the Buddha himself” (p. 54). This is a persuasive clarification of the logic of the early Buddhist language-game, but perhaps it needs to be corrected in light of the view that “nibbāna during life is temporary stopping of all the personality-factors, and is not ever-present in the Arahant” (Harvey 1995, p. 189).

Christopher Key Chapple points out the soteriological value of Abhidhamma analysis: “Before the *skandhas* can be ‘given up’ or somehow transcended, however, they must be fully understood; this is the task undertaken by the Abhidharmaists” (p. 81). To the objection that the scholastic complexities of Abhidharma “seem to obscure the enlightenment process rather than elucidate it,” Chapple responds that its analyses should be taken as prescriptive rather than descriptive (p. 90). The need for sophisticated psychological analysis arose from the practice of meditation; later Nāgārjuna and the Yogācārins saw the need for resimplification (p. 96). Such paradigm shifts are not to be seen as movements within history but as radical originary transformations of self-identity. Buddhism requires that we free ourselves from all conditioned notions and thus “become radically ahistorical” (p. 97). I very much doubt if the sequence from Abhidharma to Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, and on to Tantra, can be understood solely in terms of inner spiritual awareness, independent of historical cultural context. Chapple’s “perennial philosophy” outlook leads to the claim that “the culminating experience in Samkhya is the same as that deemed by the Buddha to qualify his disciples for arhat-hood” (p. 99), as well as to parallels with Plato and John of the Cross. Without the ballast of close attention to differences of historical styles and contexts, Chapple flounders amid platitudes about mysticism.

Mahinda Deegalle discusses nirvana, “its social significance and its importance as a paradigm for our lives” (p. 106). Rejecting Shundo Tachibana’s claim that enlightenment takes us “beyond the sphere of morality” (p. 113), he argues that merit-making (*puñña*) is transcended, but not morality as wholesome and skillful (*kusala*). The arahants’ actions are not conditioned by rules, but they nonetheless act morally for the well-being of the world. Thus nirvāṇa is “the development of good qualities such as loving kindness, compassion, generosity, equanimity, and sympathetic joy” (p. 116). This refutes Mahāyāna portrayals of the Theravāda quest of nirvāṇa as egoistic. But the numinous quality of nirvāṇa is whittled away in boy-scout language of the following kind: “After attaining nirvāṇa, that person can share the spiritual experience with the world as a ‘social worker’” (p. 116). On p. 115 Deegalle begins to list four attitudes, but the fourth has dropped out, with the unfortu-

nate result that the third—to care for one’s own well-being and not that of others—is called the ideal. He means the fourth, “which surpasses the superficial distinction between altruism and egoism” (p. 116).

Drawing on Wittgenstein, A. D. P. Kalansuriya argues “that the issue about the Buddhist life after death or life before birth is not an empirical one, and that therefore, the issue of truth or falsity in this context is inappropriate” (p. 134). The topic of rebirth is value-oriented, not fact-oriented: “A fact-finding mission in this regard, hence amounts to a wrong-pursuit” (p. 136). The too short essay does not develop this insight very richly, as if imitating the casual skimpiness of some Christian invokers of Wittgenstein.

A. L. Herman rejects “two dogmas of Buddhism”: that impermanence inevitably leads to pain, and that that impermanence and sorrow can both be ended in *nirvāṇa*. His arguments are rather elementary: the practice of Buddhism, whether in search of *nirvāṇa* or of a “true Self” (a goal he attributes to Mahāyāna) is itself an impermanent activity, but one that leads to happiness. Thus impermanence does not inevitably lead to pain. In the activity of thought “*duḥkha* is absent, for some temporarily, for others permanently” (p. 167). But I note that the Buddha urges repulsion for “that which is called mind [*citta*], thought [*manas*], consciousness [*viññāṇa*]” as much as for the body (COLLINS 1982, p. 235). As to *nirvāṇa*, Herman argues, it is either suicidal extinction, and therefore a goal not worthy of being pursued, or the fulfillment of our desires for peace and tranquility, in which case “desire is not ended or blown out and the whole intent of *nirvāṇa* is contradicted” (p. 170). This incoherence is so great that the dogma of *nirvāṇa* has to be abandoned. The essay crackles with Anglo-Saxon positivism and seems innocent of hermeneutics.

Ramakrishna Puligandla asks whether dependent origination is “an analytic truth, a synthetic truth, or an inductive generalization” (p. 175). It is not an analytic truth, since its denial does not imply a contradiction. But “the denial of the doctrine... unlike that of a synthetic truth, cannot, in principle, be true” (p. 178). We cannot imagine a phenomenon appearing and disappearing on its own. The author is not happy to see it as a Kantian synthetic a priori truth, necessary for the possibility of experience, “much like the statements ‘every event has a cause’ and ‘something cannot arise out of nothing’” (p. 180) for these are abstract logical necessities. The doctrine is “experienced directly and purely phenomenologically” (p. 181) and is “open to certification by anyone who is willing to conduct inquiry” (p. 177). This is not induction but insight into the necessary nature of phenomena; thus the doctrine is a “phenomenological-analytical truth” (p. 182). This suggests to me an interesting project: a phenomenological interpretation of dependent origination in relation with the laws of phenomenality worked out by Husserl and Heidegger.

I noticed 237 errata.

3. The ten essays in *The Authority of Experience* seek the empirical correlatives of the classical terminology of Buddhism, with particular reference to the resources offered by contemporary scientific psychology. The authors are

chiefly concerned with how Buddhism can save psychology from dehumanizing objectifications, but their questions are also of value to Buddhist tradition, warding off the danger that a sacrosanct vocabulary takes on a life of its own and becomes a screen against the spiritual insight that it originally denoted.

John Pickering has a rather officious introduction to each essay, in addition to his foreword and afterword (39 pages in all). His own essay spells out the program behind the collection—to restore the authority of experience in the psychological sciences, which have fallen victim to a positivism that seeks rather to explain experience away. Padmal de Silva gives a level-headed general account of the Buddhist approach to psychology, and notes the value of mindfulness in warding off the ruminative cognitive cycles that are a major factor in relapse into states of depression (p. 68). His namesake Padmasiri de Silva also discusses the benefits of mindfulness, which deals with the past only in a pragmatic and contextual way, in contrast with Freud's "obsession with the past" (p. 137). He has interesting remarks about alexithymia, the inability to get in touch with one's emotions. Unfortunately his paper is so full of mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and typography that it is hard to take seriously.

David Fontana stresses that the rationality and testability of Buddhist insight does not exclude personalized authority within the master-disciple relationship. This is opposed to the "modernist, reductionist methodology" imposed on the Western student of psychology (p. 35). Fontana's knowledge of Buddhism is slight; he thinks the *skandhas* are the five senses, with consciousness as a sixth *skandha* (p. 36). He misspells *śūnyatā* as *sunyatta* throughout. He speaks in very global terms of Buddhism, arguing that the Buddhist schools "differ much less from each other in any fundamental sense than do (for example) the various Christian denominations" (p. 45). His plea that Western science should let experience speak for itself instead of imposing an artificial fragmentation is hardly raised above banality by an injection of pop Buddhism.

Brian L. Lancaster finds analogues to Buddhist non-self in the computer and in dissociations of consciousness which produce "implicit processing in the absence of explicit awareness" (p. 176). These show the constructed, interpretative character of "I"-awareness. "By not identifying with the immediate self-reinforcing interpretation of events, a broader framework of causation and context is opened up.... 'I' as a controlling element in the interfacing of sensory and thought events with memory will be maintained; but it will become a less restrictive interface, for the matrix from which it is constructed will have been enlarged" (p. 185). Here a modern scientific language intersects effectively with that of Abhidharma, as both attend to mental micro-processes normally concealed from our awareness. Lancaster wants to import into the cold, value-free world of cognitive science the Buddhist moral and soteriological concern. He warns against "a danger of 'importing' a view of no-self which, wrenched out of the context in which it was developed, simply reinforces a certain vacuousness and nihilism in contemporary society" (p. 188).

Unfortunately, Lancaster then proposes a substantialist reading of Buddhism according to which "at root the individual is one and undivided, having

an unconditioned nature. Our ignorance lies in not recognising this ultimate sense of becomingness as self” (p. 190). If one omitted the “not” in this last sentence it would be closer to what is actually taught in the text he cites, the *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-śāstra* (as discussed in RAMANAN 1966, pp. 98–110). The language of self is admitted in that text only as a conventional skillful means, and non-self is the ultimate truth. The annihilationist extreme rejected there is not that which denies self of nirvana but only that which denies the everyday conventional self. This strong doctrine of non-self distances Buddhism even from the spiritual texts of the West to which Lancaster points in his final pages.

Sadly, this volume comes to us in a state of undress. Sloppily edited, its lack of typographical standards reinforces the suspicion that British publishing is in a bad way. On page 124, for example, there occur the words: “disordered,” “oversimplfy,” “vulnerable,” “tradiditions.” In one line on page 72 we have “estoeric,” “inaccesible,” and “neccessary.” It would be difficult to find a single page without at least one glaring misprint. I noticed 359 errata. It is painfully ironic that a volume that preaches mindfulness so enthusiastically should display such a lack of it on every page.

4. Paul Williams’s *Altruism and Reality* deals with the eighth-century poetic text of the Madhayamaka monk Śāntideva, in a series of five essays that trace the discussion of five verses through the Indian and Tibetan commentarial tradition. His book has much in common with those reviewed above, for at its heart is a discussion of the psychological implications of the Buddhist doctrine of non-self in its correct and especially in its incorrect interpretations. Śāntideva himself is seen as denying the reality of the conventional everyday self (in contrast to the Gelugpa interpretation of Madhyamaka). This launches Williams on a passionately argued denunciation of “Buddhist/Humean/Parfitian reductionism concerning the self” (p. 177), which deserves the close attention of all students of Buddhism. Common Buddhist conceptions, such as that wholes do not exist, but are merely conceptual constructions from their parts, are demolished by Williams in an array of lucid arguments, behind which one senses the eruption of a long-repressed protest of common sense against widely influential mystifications. Like the child pointing at the naked emperor, Williams shows the absurdity of imagining that mountains came into existence when minds appeared, or that the unity of water as a combination of oxygen and hydrogen is a mental construct, or that persons and natural kinds are reducible to the sum of their parts as an artifact such as a chariot is. “If there were no trees then it would not be possible to conceptualise a tree, on the basis of its component parts or otherwise. And it also seems clear to me that if there were no persons given first then we could not even begin to conceptualise a person in dependence upon feet, hands, and the stream of mental events” (p. 121).

As a graphic relation of what the non-self preached by some Buddhologists would look like in practice, Williams discusses Korsakov’s syndrome, a form of amnesia that reduces people to “Humean beings” who are nothing but a bundle of sensations in permanent flux (p. 137). Some would see this as a verification of Buddhist theory, but Williams points out that it undermines

such basic Buddhist concepts as *dukkha* and the bodhisattva path. Śāntideva writes: “The one of whom there is pain does not exist. Therefore of whom will be the ownership of that?” (p. 105). But pain cannot be experienced except by a subject, unless one is like Dickens’s Mrs Gradgrind who “thinks there is a pain in her room somewhere” but “is not sure whether she is the one who has got it or not” (p. 140). Without a subject the bodhisattva commitment to removing pain lacks a context that gives it meaning. Williams rather spoils his argument by silly examples of the kind that too often pop up in analytical philosophy, such as the case of a bodhisattva “captured by a fiendish scientist who plans to exchange my brain with that of Hitler” (p. 167), or the case of masochists: “presumably the bodhisattva would strive also to eliminate their pain even if the very elimination of it caused them suffering” (p. 165). His arguments would be more fecund if he stayed in closer contact with the texts, which are so enviably accessible to him, or with real-life consequences of misunderstanding the non-self teaching. At one stage he talks about counseling as requiring above all that we focus on the individual “in their very uniqueness” (pp. 174–75). I wonder if Buddhism would not bring a salutary detachment to what is possibly a fetishization of uniqueness here.

Does Śāntideva really deny the conventional self, or is he calling it a fiction only in the sense that it does not truly exist as it appears to exist? Williams claims that Śāntideva’s arguments do not work unless he is denying the existence even of the conventional self, but he may be pouncing too eagerly on a text that does not have very high philosophical pretensions. But he is aiming at a wider target, namely the common Buddhist rhetoric of the discontinuity of the self. If I am told that someone like me, with a causal connection to me, is to be hanged tomorrow morning, I will feel sad. But if I am told that it is I myself who will be hanged, I receive the news with quite different feelings. For Buddhism, Williams claims, there is no difference between these two situations, and that is an unreal and dehumanizing theory. One wishes he had given more space to a positive explanation of how Buddhism can relativize our everyday sense of self and conduce to altruism.

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