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Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy by Jay L. Garfield (review)

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(Review)

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the author's style and to investigate, among other things, what is "new" and what is "traditional" in Indian *śāstras*. Finally, at a time when most scholars are under enormous pressure to "produce" as many books and articles as possible, Benson's course of taking the time to edit and translate an entire text offers a much less ephemeral contribution to our field.

Notes

- 1 – For instance, Āpadeva's *Mīmāṃsānyāyaprakāśa* (edited in Edgerton 1929) and its compendium (or source), Laugākṣi Bhāskara's *Arthasaṅgraha* (first edited in Thibaut 1882). The *Mānameyodaya* (Raja and Sastri 1933) deals with Mīmāṃsā epistemology and ontology, not with ritual.
- 2 – On the general problem of earlier texts being reused and embedded in later discourse, see Freschi 2015.
- 3 – The hyphen in "a-theist" is to indicate that it is unclear whether the ancient Mīmāṃsā tradition was explicitly against believing in any sort of god. It is clear, however, that there was no interest in introducing a supernatural being into the system.

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For as long as scholars have been presenting Asian thinkers to readers of European languages, efforts have been made to present the presumably less familiar Asian thinkers as having points of commonality with the presumably more familiar European thinkers. In presenting classical Indian Buddhist philosophers to his readers in the

1920s and 1930s, for example, Stcherbatsky portrayed them as anticipating important features of European philosophers. In his study of Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are depicted as adumbrating the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. In the works of other scholars, the presentation of early Buddhism as an anticipation of aspects of Hume became commonplace. A number of scholars have suggested that some Buddhists had important resemblances to some of the American Pragmatists, while others have pointed out resemblances to some of the Logical Positivists. In some cases these comparisons, as stated above, have been to present something less familiar in terms of something more familiar. In other cases, there has been a more pointed agenda of arguing that the classical thinkers of areas colonized by European powers were every bit as worthy of attention as the thinkers that were part of the cultural heritage of the colonizers—a point that colonizers have not always appreciated. In yet other cases, one example of which is Archie J. Bahm, it has been suggested that unless one has a basic familiarity with the philosophical traditions of Europe, India, and China, then one cannot claim to be well educated in philosophy. Most of the early efforts to show points of commonality between Asian and Western thinkers were relatively limited in scope. It has been only in the current generation of philosophers that one finds Asian thinkers compared with a fairly wide range of Western philosophers. One of the most ambitious efforts to do this is the work under review here.

In *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* Jay Garfield states that his intention is “to show that we in the West can talk with, not about, philosophers and texts in the Buddhist tradition” (p. 15). His approach is that of a philosopher rather than that of a philologist or historian of ideas, and his intended audience is primarily philosophers open to engaging with traditions outside Europe, and specifically with Buddhist philosophers. As Garfield states his focus (p. 15): “I will hence be concerned not with the context in which the texts I address were composed, or how we can understand those contexts, but rather with the contemporary context in the West, and what we can learn by taking these texts seriously in our own intellectual lives.” In the final chapter, “Methodological Postscript,” Garfield summarizes what he hopes to have accomplished:

I have been arguing that contemporary philosophy cannot continue to be practiced in the West in ignorance of the Buddhist tradition. It is too rich, too sophisticated to be disparaged. Its concerns overlap with those of Western philosophy too broadly to dismiss it as irrelevant. Its perspectives are sufficiently distinct that we cannot see it as simply redundant. Close enough for conversation; distant enough for that conversation to be one from which we might learn. (p. 318)

Trained as an historian of Indian philosophy and a Sanskritist, I must leave it to contemporary philosophers to judge how convinced they are by Garfield’s book that contemporary philosophy must take Buddhist philosophy seriously if it is to continue. What I can do is offer a few comments on the scholarship of Buddhism he presents in the course of making his case to contemporary philosophers. Before that, however, an overview of the structure of the book is in order.

In the first chapter, “What is Buddhist philosophy?” Garfield begins with the interesting observation that when he is working with Tibetan scholars, they often fail to appreciate how vast and varied the Western philosophical tradition is, and when working with Western philosophers, they fail to appreciate how vast and varied the Buddhist tradition is. Part of his aim in this book is to help both sets of colleagues to have a better understanding of how complex both of these philosophical traditions are and to see that there is simply no accurate answer to “What is *the* Western view of consciousness?” or “What is *the* Buddhist view of the value of testimony?” He explains that when he uses the term “Buddhist philosophy” he will be referring to “an orientation that involves a broad metaphysical account of reality, a diagnosis of the fundamental human condition that rests on that account, and a soteriological and ethical framework resting on that diagnosis.” This framework, he goes on to say, and the many arguments made to support it combine to make up a body of ideas that “contemporary philosophers can and should take seriously” (p. 14). After issuing a disclaimer that the book is not meant to be an introduction to Buddhist philosophy or to Asian Buddhist culture, Garfield offers a whirlwind tour of the development of Buddhist philosophy in India, Tibet, and East Asia, a dizzyingly fast tour that might make a historian of any one of the many Asian philosophies raise an eyebrow but that should be useful to anyone not at all familiar with the contours of Buddhist thought in Asia.

Chapter 2 is titled “The Metaphysical Perspective I: Interdependence and Impermanence.” Here the reader will find a detailed and useful discussion of the concept of dependent origination, which outlines the various ways in which Buddhist scholastics talked about something being dependent on something else; effects are dependent on causes and conditions, wholes on parts (and vice versa), and entities upon conceptual imputation. In the final subsection to this section on dependent origination, Garfield discusses connections of these ideas with some Western philosophical moves. In that context he makes this important observation:

By seeing the ways in which this network of ideas crosscuts more familiar philosophical divides, we come to see that Buddhist metaphysics is not some Western program being prosecuted by other means, but a very different way of taking up with metaphysical questions, with insights of its own that demand serious attention. (p. 38)

The discussion of dependent origination is followed by an equally detailed account of Buddhist discussions of the nature and implications of impermanence, a section that includes a discussion of conventional truth and the doctrine of linguistic meaning as *anyāpoha*, both of which topics receive more detailed treatment in subsequent chapters. In the concluding paragraph of this chapter Garfield observes, “While Buddhist viewpoints may not always strike us as natural, they should strike us as reasonable, as demanding consideration, and as repaying contemplation” (p. 55).

Chapter 3 continues the metaphysical theme with the title “The Metaphysical Perspective II: Emptiness.” This chapter contains a survey of different Buddhist takes on emptiness, from the pre-Mahāyāna to the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra perspectives and on to developments of the notion in the Huayan school. A key point made

in the discussion of Madhyamaka is that “Taking Madhyamaka seriously—whether in its Indo-Tibetan or Chinese guise—is to take seriously the possibility that metaphysics is directed not at a deeper analysis of reality, but at extirpating the need for a deeper analysis” (p. 88). The chapter concludes with further reflections on the doctrine of two truths. Toward the end of this section Garfield furthers a point made in the quotation just above:

Ontology is not going to deliver us a final account of the nature of things, simply because the very idea of a final account, or a nature of things, may be just plain incoherent. Instead, to the extent that we are interested in the nature of the world in which we live, a metaphysically modest inventory of what we find, together with a psychologically sophisticated account of the manner in which the present world and ourselves to ourselves, and of the sources of distortion that inevitably involves, including the sources of distortion of any account of any sources of distortion can yield a modicum of humility regarding that understanding. This may be all philosophy can or should deliver. (p. 88)

Chapters 4 and 5 deal, respectively, with the self and consciousness. Both chapters begin with surveys of the stances taken in Western philosophy and then move on to surveys of key Buddhist positions. Both chapters are rich in information and in insights. In the concluding paragraph of the chapter on consciousness Garfield says of the potential Buddhist contribution to the discussion that Buddhist philosophy “brings a suite of insights that can refigure debates and ways of thinking about the topic. Instead of seeing consciousness as a singular phenomenon, a natural surd perhaps requiring non-natural explanations, the Buddhist asks us to think of consciousness as a family of relations that subjects might bear to their objects” (p. 174).

Chapter 6, “Phenomenology,” begins with an observation that the term is used variously by different Western philosophers but that the basic project of phenomenological discussion is a reflection on the first-person perspective or subjectivity. Phenomenology, he explains on page 186, is not a form of metaphysical inquiry but an alternative to it in which the task is not to determine the nature of things but rather to inquire into “our mode of subjectivity in relation to those things.” In this chapter Garfield states the case for a phenomenological reading of Buddhism:

I think that phenomenological reflection is absolutely central to—but easy to miss in—Buddhist philosophy. It is easy to miss, because it is not thematized as such. Buddhist phenomenological reflection is undertaken often in what appears to be a metaphysical, epistemological or even psychological or soteriological register, and it is hence easy to overlook the fact that in a particular case (and we will consider cases below) what is really at issue is phenomenology. Phenomenology is central to Buddhist thought, because in the end, Buddhism is about the transformation of the way we experience the world. (p. 179)

The end of Buddhist phenomenological reflection is summarized thus:

The more we pay attention to our own subjective character, the more we realize we are not subjects; the more we realize that, the more we realize that that to which we respond as our object is not apprehended as it is; and the more we can shed the myth of

subject-object duality and the immediacy of our relation to subjectivity, the more honestly we can understand our participation in the reality we inhabit. This is the goal of a Buddhist phenomenology. (p. 212)

Chapters 7 and 8, “Epistemology” and “Logic and the Philosophy of Language,” deal largely with the contributions of the philosophers Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and their many commentators in India and Tibet. Although this particular philosophical tradition was touched upon relatively lightly in East Asian Buddhism, Garfield includes interesting reflections on the contributions of Sanlun philosophers in China, who had much to say on the topic of why not much can be said.

The ninth chapter deals with ethics and begins with the refreshing observation that “It is important when approaching Buddhist moral theory to resist the temptation to assimilate Buddhist ethics to some system of Western ethics” (p. 278). Rather than getting stuck, as several other writers on the topic of Buddhist ethics have done, on the question of whether Buddhist ethics is more akin to some form of consequentialism or to some variety of virtue ethics or character ethics, Garfield continues with the phenomenological theme of his book by saying “Buddhist moral theorists see ethics as concerned not primarily with actions, their consequences, obligations, sentiments or human happiness, but rather with the nature of our experience” (p. 279). In this chapter he masterfully shows the ethical dimensions of much of what was discussed in the first eight chapters. As in other chapters, Garfield concludes by observing that a study of Buddhist ethics can enrich contemporary philosophy because Buddhist philosophers asked different kinds of questions than their Western counterparts—questions coming from a more phenomenological perspective than has been customary in most of the history of Western philosophy.

The final chapter, “Methodological Postscript,” raises an interesting series of questions about the interpretation of texts. Garfield cites the well-known four reliances—on the teaching rather than the teacher, on the meaning rather than the words, on the directly stated rather than the circuitous, and on wisdom rather than on ordinary consciousness—and then shows how each one of these pieces of advice is fraught with further questions. How can one know that the teaching is independent of the teacher having taught it? How can we rely on meaning except through words? How can we know whether a statement is literally true or in need of interpretation? How can we be sure that we are truly relying on wisdom rather than a judgment that seems compelling to the mind that is still influenced by greed, hatred, and delusion? This, in turn, leads to an examination of various biases that any interpreter of texts is prone to having; for example, one reader may have the biased conviction that an older text is likely to be closer than a later text to the letter or the spirit of what the Buddha taught, while another may have the biased conviction that a statement coming out of hundreds of years of careful discussion and reflection by scholars or yogins is more worthy of consideration than an undigested pericope. Some may see the Buddha as having given a definitive account of things that cannot possibly be improved upon, while others may see the Buddha as setting out working hypotheses

that subsequent generations tested and replaced with more sophisticated working hypotheses. Another question that Garfield examines is that of how one gets at the original intentions of an author, or to a first generation of readers of or listeners to a flow of words. This final chapter, then, is a reminder of the importance of being mindful of one's own prejudices in reading a text and of being open to the possibility that interpretations differing from one's own may be worthy of serious consideration.

As one can see from this brief synopsis of the contents, this book is quite ambitious. A look at the index of the book will show that the range of philosophers from both the Western and the Asian Buddhist traditions is impressive. Garfield reminds his reader repeatedly throughout the book that his accounts of issues necessarily lack the depth and detail that a monograph on the problem at hand would go into; that said, the amount of detail is impressive, and it is difficult to imagine that one could read this book without learning quite a lot, and without feeling at least invited to look at a number of issues with a freshened gaze. The book is lucidly written so that whatever struggles the reader may have are with the difficulty of the issues themselves rather than with the manner in which they are stated.

While the book as a whole is a most welcome contribution to the field of cross-cultural philosophy (and, one hopes, to philosophy simpliciter), there are aspects of the scholarship behind what is said philosophically that somewhat diminish the authority of the book. First, there are quite a few blunders in the rendering of Sanskrit words, and occasionally of names, some of which are obviously simply typographical errors that were not picked up in the final proofreading. For example: *prajñāptisāt* occurs throughout for *prajñāptisat*; *ākara* (p. 50) should be *ākāra*; *svārtānumāna* (p. 346) should be *svārthānumāna*; *Vajrachedika* (p. 65) should be *Vajracchedikā*; *Paramārthasamutgāta* (p. 71) should be *Paramārthasamutgata*; *samprajāna* (pp. 127–128 and 304 and in the index) should be *samprajanya*; *svaprakāśa* (p. 143) should be *svaprakāśa*; *niścaya* (p. 160) should be *niścaya*; *Pramānavartikka* (p. 215) should be *Pramānavārttika*; *vyapti* (p. 217 et passim) should be *vyāpti*; *prasāṅga* (p. 217 n. 3) should be *prasaṅga*; *anyāpoha* (p. 218 et passim) should be *anyāpoha*; *vasana* (p. 220 n. 4) should be *vāsanā*; *pratijñā* (p. 250) in the sense of a proposition as the meaning of a sentence in the context of Dignāga's work should be *pratibhā*; *sarvaga* (p. 287) should be *sarvatraga*; *sparsa* (p. 287) should be *sparsā*; Nhat Hahn (pp. 297 ff.) and Naht Hahn (in the bibliography, p. 351) should be Nhat Hanh; *bhāvacakra* (p. 302) should be *bhavacakra*; *avidya* (p. 302) should be *avidyā*; Mañjuṣa (p. 303 n. 16) should be Mañjuṣoṣa; Kanon (p. 303 n. 16) should be Kannon; Māñjuśrī (p. 303 n. 16) should be Mañjuśrī; *samprajñana* (p. 304) should probably be *samprajanya*; and *Mahāsatiptaṅṅānasutta* (p. 305) should be *Mahāsatiptaṅṅānasutta*.

Given that the primary audience of the book is philosophers rather than Sanskritists, one wonders whether all the Sanskrit words (even those that are rendered correctly, which is the vast majority) are even helpful; they may be a distraction. Along with these infelicities in Sanskrit one finds an occasional factual error; for example, Garfield identifies Dharmottara as the author of the *Nyāyabindu* and says it is a

subcommentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*, whereas in fact Dharmakīrti is the author of the *Nyāyabindu*, an independent work to which Dharmottara wrote a commentary.

Considering again that the primary audience of this book is English-reading philosophers rather than Indologists, it is probably not a bad idea to identify Sanskrit texts by more easily remembered English translations of their titles than by their sometimes daunting Sanskrit titles. Garfield has accordingly talked about *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* rather than *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, giving the Sanskrit title in parentheses on first occurrence and in the index but using the English title on all subsequent occurrences in the text. For an English-reading audience unfamiliar with Sanskrit, this is a wise and thoughtful policy.

While the policy itself makes good sense, there are a few particular titles the translations of which were puzzling. The title of *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (p. 20) is rendered "Discourse Unraveling the Thought." This translation captures the sense of the Tibetan title of the text, but why not refer to one of the existing translations, so as not to confound the reader with unnecessary alternatives? John Keenan translated the sutra under the title *Scripture on the Explication of the Underlying Meaning* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000); Étienne Lamotte translated it into French under the title *Samdhinirmocana Sutra: L'explication des Mystères* (Louvain: Bureaux du recueil, Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1935); and John Powers chose not to translate the title at all in his *Wisdom of Buddha: The Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1935).

There are a few confusing inconsistencies in the English versions of titles. In texts with titles containing the word *avatāra*, Garfield usually follows the convention of rendering that word as "introduction," as when he translates *Madhyamakāvātāra* as "Introduction to the Middle Way," but he renders *Bodhicaryāvātāra* (the Sanskrit title of which is given in Tibetan translations as *Bodhisattvacaryāvātāra*) as "How to Lead an Awakened Life." The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* is given as "Entry into Lanka Sūtra" (p. 71), whereas a more accurate translation of the full Sanskrit title would be "Introduction of the Mahāyāna to Laṅka." In texts with titles containing the word *saṃgraha*, Garfield sometimes chooses to take that word as meaning encyclopedia, in other places as anthology; *Tattvasaṃgraha* is translated rather oddly as "Encyclopedia of Ontology" (p. 102)—oddly, because the text is neither like encyclopedias as they are known in the West nor restricted in subject matter to ontology—but *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* is rendered as "Anthology of the Mahāyāna" (p. 258). In both cases, a better translation of *saṃgraha* might be "summary" or "compendium." Another text whose English title misleadingly suggests that it is an encyclopedia, when in fact it is a collection (*samuccaya*, and not *samuccāya*, as it appears in several places in Garfield's book) of previous writings by a single author, is Dignāga's *Pramāṇasa-muccaya*.

In more substantial matters of content, Garfield's account of the four *pratyayas* (pp. 29–30) sounds convincing enough, but it should be pointed out that his account does not accord with how they are explained elsewhere, for example in the *Abhidharma-kośa*, which sets the standard for most of Indian scholastic Buddhism. It would be

helpful to the reader to know more about the source of his interpretation of these four types of condition. Garfield explains *ālambanapratyaya*, for example, as “a standing, simultaneous state of affairs that enables an effect to eventuate, such as fertile soil. In a more familiar case, a table is an observed support for a book, and a condition of its not falling to the floor.” In Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*, on the other hand, *ālambanapratyaya* is explained more narrowly as that which occasions and supports a cognition. The color red, for example, is an *ālambanapratyaya* of the experience of red, that is, of the visual cognition (*cakṣurvijñāna*) that has the color red as its content (*viśaya*). Vasubandhu’s understanding of that term is followed by Dignāga in his *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, in which the central understanding is that an experience is veridical if the cognitive content (*viśaya*) of that experience corresponds to that which occasions the experience, in other words, the *ālambana* of the experience. He then shows that the account of Buddhist atomists cannot be a good account, for they claim that what occasions an experience of a macroscopic object such as a jar is a cluster of earth atoms, and yet the content of the experience is a jar, not a cluster of earth atoms. A person thinks “I see a jar” rather than “I see a cluster of earth atoms.” That being the case, there is a problem in the notion that an experience is accurate or veridical when the content of the experience corresponds to the reality that occasions the experience.

Garfield does mention Dignāga in a footnote to his explanation of what an *ālambanapratyaya* is but misleadingly says that Dignāga uses the term in a more narrow sense than other authors do. In fact, Dignāga closely follows the *abhidharma* tradition, and especially Vasubandhu.

There is one further quibble I have with an explanation of a term that Garfield gives. On page 185 he says, “We can think of *vedanā* loosely as the sensory component of perceptual experience; it is pre-conceptual, and it is immediately and primitively affective. The pleasurable scent and red sensation is *vedanā*; the awareness of it as an experience of a rose is *vijñāna*.” That is thinking about these terms a little too loosely. Garfield’s account is not the usual understanding that one finds in most (in fact, all that I know about) Buddhist literature on the five aggregates (*pañcaskandha*). The usual account is that the perceptual, pre-conceptual sensation of red color is *vijñāna*, specifically *cakṣurvijñāna* (awareness via the visual faculty); the sensation of scent is *ghrāṇavijñāna* (awareness via the olfactory faculty). Registering pleasure of the red color is the primitively affective *vedanā*, as is registering of the pleasure of the scent. Knowing that the two sensations are called red and sweet-scented are examples of *saṃjñā*, as is the (fanciful) notion that the color and the scent together are features of a single object called a rose. Hedonic evaluation (*vedanā*) is not necessarily pre-conceptual, but rather it can, and usually does, occur simultaneously with the conceptual moves known as *saṃjñā* (which consists in naming, identifying, recognizing, associating with prior experiences, etc.). The simultaneity is important, because the way a sensation is recognized or conceptualized may very well influence whether it is hedonically evaluated as pleasant or unpleasant. If, for example, a fast-moving patch of color is accompanied or immediately followed by the notion of “my dog,” it is likely to be attended by a hedonic evaluation of pleasure, but if that

fast-moving patch of color is accompanied by the notion of “mountain lion,” it is more likely to be evaluated as displeasure (provided one finds fear unpleasant).

The amount of space that has been devoted in this review to minor errata should not in any sense be taken as evidence of the reviewer’s displeasure. While I would argue that getting details right is important even in a broad overview, I would also say that so much in this book is gotten right that it is a work that is likely to be consulted for many years to come and will amply repay anyone who reads it with care and then rereads it. It is a rich feast to be digested slowly.

Selected Works of D. T. Suzuki, Volume I: Zen. Edited by Richard M. Jaffe. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014. Pp. lviii + 273. Hardcover \$59.95, ISBN 978-0-520-26919-4.

Zen Dust: The History of the Koan and Koan Study in Rinzai (Lin-chi) Zen. By Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki. Pp. xx + 531. Paper \$83.00, ISBN 978-1-922169-12-9.



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The two fine books under review represent in different but complementary ways very successful efforts to revise and reprint what can be considered modern “classic” writings on Zen Buddhist thought, with a strong emphasis on the Rinzai sect, that were produced either by an eminent Japanese scholar or an American working in collaboration with a Japanese researcher and were initially circulated in the West through the 1960s. These writings had a remarkably influential impact on the course of Zen studies at the time, but in the intervening years have largely fallen into disuse or a decline in reputation. However, they are richly deserving of the current editorial exercises leading to a recovery and rehabilitation so that a new audience can appropriate in the twenty-first century their rightful historical place as well as ongoing utility, since the writings remain highly effective and in many ways up-to-date resources on the topic.

Both books can be evaluated in terms of (1) editorial issues, or how well they repackage the original materials, given the multitude of recent changes in standards involving the use of foreign terminology and scholarly annotations, among other concerns, and (2) content issues, or the significance and relevance of the writings that are being disseminated anew for today’s understanding of Zen. In the case of the D. T. Suzuki volume, the second item for assessment also includes the matter of appraising whether and to what extent the relatively short pieces that were selected from among the author’s vast corpus on Zen are sufficiently representative. A related issue pertains to how the set of writings holds up in light of sometimes withering