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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*  
by Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

Review by: Paul Waldau

Source: *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 3, The Philosophy of Jainism (Jul., 2000),  
pp. 468-471

Published by: University of Hawai'i Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1400191>

Accessed: 04-09-2017 07:32 UTC

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consensual alternatives for promoting a more balanced relationship among the individual, the community, and the state. It is to such Confucian advocates, and not spokesmen for state power, that one should look for a genuine Chinese communitarianism as the basis for the advancement of human rights. (p. 157)

Although de Bary wants to argue that within the Chinese tradition there are elements on which to ground a somewhat revised conception of human rights, perhaps it would have been illuminating for him to offer some comparisons between Confucian communitarianism and Western communitarianism as represented by, among others, John Dewey and Michael J. Sandel. As de Bary states earlier in the book, the current conception of human rights is too individualistic for easy importation into China. On this basis, it is our notion of human rights, perhaps even more than the underpinnings of Chinese culture, that needs to be modified in order for human rights and Chinese culture to have a more fruitful interaction than has hitherto been the case.<sup>3</sup> If our notion of human rights could be expanded to apply not only to the liberal tradition but also to communitarian traditions, there might be more hope for the successful establishment of human rights in China.

#### Notes

- 1 – De Bary characterizes “personalism” as expressing “the worth and dignity of the person, not as a raw, ‘rugged’ individual, but as a self shaped and formed in the context of a given cultural tradition, its own social community, and its natural environment to reach full personhood” (p. 25).
- 2 – By “liberal,” de Bary means upholding the principles of voluntarism, local autonomy, consensual and cooperative arrangements for the improvement of village life, and minimizing bureaucratic intervention at the local level.
- 3 – It is useful to point out that Chinese culture arguably has a more enduring history than human rights.

*Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*. Edited by Daniel L. Smith-Christopher. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, 1998. Pp. 177. Paper \$10.00.

Reviewed by **Paul Waldau** Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine

*Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*, edited by Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, is a fascinating collection that offers the informed reader, interested scholar, and student access to a surprising number of issues and perspectives on the attempts by religious traditions to speak to the many forms of violence in the modern world. Even as religious traditions are in ferment and differ dramatically in assumptions, claims, and discourse, they have much to say on living nonviolently. The ten essays here include a short introduction; pieces on Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism/Daoism, Hinduism, an indigenous tradition from North

America, Islam, and Judaism; and a substantial epilogue by Donald Swearer. A thorough engagement with this collection will provoke many questions regarding the extent of the remarkable human ability to include "others," be they human or otherwise, in our community.

Consider the organizing concept that determines the extent of what are to be considered "peace" and the "subverting of hatred." Posed as a plain question, the issue is "Who and what will be in the protected inner circle, and who and what will be outside and subjected legitimately, in the believer's or scholar's opinion, to non-compassion and/or violence?" This fundamentally *ethical* challenge can, of course, be framed as a *religious* question: "To whom or what will the Muslim's *salam*, the Jew's *shalom*, the Christian's peaceable kingdom, the Hindu's and Jain's *ahimsā*, the Buddhist's several forms of compassion, the indigene's sense of connection, or the general status of 'neighbor' and/or 'community member' be extended?" In short, how will we answer the question "What is nonviolence?"

These questions tantalize. Can we ferret out significant differences, even broad categories, in the approaches of religious traditions to "violence"? Do these break down along an East/West axis or on some other traditional division? Whatever the answer, the question will intrigue those inclined to seek, analyze, engage in a practical way, or even repudiate claims about the occurrence of broad, significant variations in worldviews or super-cultural complexes of ethical values generally.

Editor Christopher-Smith points out why these are not merely conceptual disputes or irrelevant games played by professional and amateur worldview analysts: "Peace is always and everywhere a challenge to live another way" (p. 10). Such questions are eminently relevant to daily life, helping one identify those organizing principles that guide the most basic perceptions and choices of individual believers, for "violence" goes well beyond the classic military conflicts ("wars") that preoccupy several of the authors in this collection. It includes, as other contributors note, phenomena ranging from seemingly innocuous acts of consumerism to the practices, degradations, and oppressions that are integral to social injustice, factory farming, biomedical experimentation, industrialization, habitual pesticide use, and monocrop agriculture. Such practices often entail extraordinary violence against individuals, humans and otherwise, including the victims of environmental racism, economism, patriarchy, speciesism, and environmental destruction.

Consider one possible way of identifying similarities and differences among these essays, namely the extent or lack of anthropocentrism found in the definitions and instances of violence that preoccupy the authors. In the essays dealing with the Abrahamic and Chinese traditions, there is a tendency to speak about violence as if it were uniquely, or at least primarily, a human against human problem. In the essay on Judaism, phrases such as "the world" (p. 116) mean "the world of humans." Similarly, *shalom* is talked about as if it were naturally directed *solely* at the human community (e.g., on p. 128), even though the Jewish tradition is marked by an ancient concern for *tsaar baale hayyim* (often translated as "pain/suffering of living things"). In the essay on Christianity, "the challenge of nonviolence within the Christian tradition" is spoken of as if the relevant community were, again, *solely* the

human community (e.g., on p. 144). Thus, the phrase “cults of violence” (p. 142) refers only to violence that affects members of the human community. Similarly, the otherwise very provocative essay on Islam remains within anthropocentric parameters, as does the essay focusing on folk-level views of violence in the indigenous Chinese traditions.

Contrast this with the essays dealing with the Indic traditions, each of which speaks regularly of nonhuman animals and the broader issues often referred to as “ecological” or “environmental” (see, e.g., pp. 13–15, 27, 69, 75–77). Are these differences merely the result of scholarly emphasis, characterization, or advocacy, or do the traditions themselves really frame the parameters of “violence” and peace in these dramatically different ways? Of course, religious traditions, by virtue of their internal diversity and success across millennia, are not well seen if their cumulative and complex features are not foregrounded. Characteristically, the traditions represented in this volume reflect a diverse range of opinions as to which lives and ecological wholes should matter to the believer. For instance, while the first-century philosopher Philo took an anthropocentric tone characteristic of the mainline interpretations of the Abrahamic traditions when he talked about a *continuous* war with other animals “whose hatred is directed . . . towards . . . mankind as a whole and endures . . . without bound and limit of time” (*De Praemiis et Poenis*, 85), there are other prominent scholars today within each of the Abrahamic traditions who speak of nonhuman animals as if they are “others” comprising an integral part of the moral agent’s relevant community (e.g., Dan Cohn-Sherbok for Judaism, B. A. Masri for Islam, and Andrew Linzey for Christianity).

Anthropocentric accounts of what constitutes violence for a Jew, Muslim, or Christian, then, may well be the product of a particular scholar’s training and preference, reflecting perhaps a bias or tradition among scholars generally rather than what a tradition actually has to offer on the subject. Such accounts may also be the product of space limitations, or even a kind of developing tradition of blinkered discourse within the burgeoning community of those engaged in “peace studies.” The harmonies, indeed the communities, known and sought by believers in the Abrahamic traditions have been considerably broader than those required for peace with other human groups.

Thus, a particularly interesting feature of this volume is that the collection as a whole, in addition to offering so much on the issue of religious views of peace and nonviolence, exemplifies the important fact that scholarly analysis often deals only with certain aspects of a tradition on the relevant subject. In conjunction with the obvious and fascinating differences among the traditions discussed here, this helps readers see the importance of distinguishing, on the one hand, scholars’ emphases when describing a tradition from, on the other hand, the complex, cumulative, internally diverse, and sometimes contradictory features of the tradition itself.

The contribution this volume makes, then, to comparative studies and, more specifically, to the burgeoning field of peace studies is a rich statement of possibilities for many kinds of peace and nonviolence, drawn from the deep wells of wisdom found in each of these traditions. The potential application of this wisdom

regarding the myriad forms of human-perpetrated violence and hatred is enormous. It can speak imaginatively to social justice movements and environmental concerns. It can also illuminate animal protection movements and their concerns for non-human animals as important individuals with an integrity, history, and value of their own. Further, the contributions to this collection can be used to shed light on the many other forms of violence that are visited on marginalized living beings, human or nonhuman. Indeed, the individual essays contain an abundance of materials, quotes, and bibliographic references that can be used for the study of any number of comparative issues, including religious authority, ethics, cosmology, mythology, doctrine, and even the sociological dimensions of religious traditions. I heartily recommend this book.

*Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities.* By Steven Collins. Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions 12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. xxiv + 684. Hardcover \$85.00.

Reviewed by **David Loy** Bunkyo University

*Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities* is an original and wide-ranging study that addresses what author Steven Collins calls the *Pali imaginaire*, a cultural and ideological system he abstracts from premodern South Asian Buddhist civilizations. It contests the notion that nirvāṇa (and the celibate world-renunciation that leads to it) was the only or the main goal sought by Buddhists. This involves a very different history of Buddhist ideas that looks at systematic and narrative thought together, in order to understand how the *summum bonum* of nirvāṇa fitted into a wider discourse of “felicities.” Integrating more worldly felicities into the picture allows overdue attention to the Buddhist heavens (usually ignored by scholars) and to the role of utopian narratives and Metteyya (Skt: Maitreya) millennialism in the agrarian societies that embraced Theravāda.

The first chapters offer the best study I have read of what early Buddhist thought says about the concept of nirvāṇa. Like his earlier book *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Collins also looks at the imagery of nirvāṇa, particularly the metaphor of nirvāṇa as a city, unimportant in the earliest texts but ubiquitous later. Instead of attempting to resolve the eternalism/annihilationism debate—an impossible task, in his view—he shows how nirvāṇa was part of a hierarchy of values that added a transcendental and unconditioned soteriology at the summit of a collection of more earthly felicities. These other goals and values are more susceptible to narrative imagination, as seen in the popular *Jātaka* tales recounting the earlier lives of the Buddha. This “de-centers” nirvāṇa, but Collins “re-centers” it by arguing that nirvāṇa, as the ineffable goal of doctrine and the “full stop (period)” of popular narratives, gives structure to the whole by providing a meaningful and satisfying resolution to the issues raised in those texts. He claims that in the resulting *Pali imaginaire* the various concepts,