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**Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflection on Realizing
a More Equitable Global Future by Peter D. Hershock
(review)**

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Philosophy East and West, Volume 64, Number 4, October 2014, pp.
1069-1075 (Review)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: 10.1353/pew.2014.0088

Philosophy East and West



A Quarterly of
Comparative Philosophy
Volume 64 - Number 4

University of Hawai'i Press

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BOOK REVIEWS

Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflection on Realizing a More Equitable Global Future.
By Peter D. Hershock. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. Pp. 332.
ISBN 978-1-438-44458-1.

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Peter D. Hershock's *Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflection on Realizing a More Equitable Global Future* is an ambitious book, yet fits squarely in the trajectory of Hershock's career thus far. In his previous works, Hershock has dealt with issues similar to those which are taken up in *Valuing Diversity*, bringing a broadly Buddhist perspective to such issues as technological advance, the rise of mass media, and economic expansion. In the present book, he considers these issues once more, but from a different vantage point and with a different goal in mind—namely, to use a Buddhist conception of diversity and difference to consider how to ensure that our increasingly interdependent and globalized world does not simply sustain (or aggravate) current patterns of poverty and inequality. Hershock argues that we should not seek to address poverty and inequality by striving for overall equality, but by enhancing diversity. While this entails a significant shift in contemporary thinking about respect, support, and freedom, Hershock seems optimistic that, if we become more aware of the foundations and patterns of contemporary thinking, we will be better able to make the necessary shift. This is indeed optimistic, but thankfully, Hershock does not simply make the argument that a shift is needed—he does a significant bit of the work for us, tracing the historical, economic, and societal trajectories that have contributed to contemporary thinking about equality and inequality. The hope is that if we follow Hershock's line of reasoning, we will contribute to a change in current patterns of thought and practice.

This line of reasoning begins in the introduction, where Hershock suggests that Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist perspectives are particularly pertinent to contemporary issues of poverty and inequality, due to their ability to acknowledge and deal with interdependence in contemporary global dynamics. For Hershock, the Buddhist idea of interdependence reconciles the polar perspectives of universal equality and fundamental particularism, providing a framework in which particularities can exist in relational equity. Much of the remainder of the book is dedicated to fleshing out how this framework interacts with contemporary global issues and the theories that seek to manage them.

The first third of the book is for the most part conceptual, dealing with ideas of difference, variety, diversity, and temporal change. Chapter 1 proposes changing our current understanding of difference to as “a relational process that *occurs* or ‘carries forward’ in a particular direction” (p. 28). In other words, difference is not a fact about something already in existence—there are not first things and then contingent differences between them. Hershock uses postmodern thinkers such as Derrida and

Deleuze to make this point, although he thinks that the postmodern conception of difference ultimately falls short as well. For postmodern thinkers, difference is still a means of distinguishing individuals from one another, whereas according to the Buddhist conception of difference presented in this chapter, differences arise out of relational patterns of interdependence and interpenetration. Hershock argues that only if we are aware of these patterns and the means of differentiation they give rise to, can we actively *make a difference* and change harmful patterns.

In chapter 2, Hershock looks more closely at the current competing conceptions of difference and how they might be resolved according to the Buddhist perspective. He makes an important distinction between variety and diversity, characterizing variety as superficial variation (as in a zoo) and diversity as “a distinctive and achieved quality of interaction” (p. 49) such as that which takes place in an ecosystem. Hershock argues that while we tend to think of the value of difference in terms of variety, it would be much better to conceive of the value of difference in line with diversity, as the relationally embodied value of “new arcs of differentiation” and “newly emerging meanings of presence” (p. 60). In other words, difference understood as the value of diversity captures the importance of self-becoming through both relating to others and differentiating oneself from others.

Chapter 3 deals more specifically with the idea that “becoming ourselves” entails progressively changing in order to become better. Hershock writes that, while the modern notion of progress entails discipline and purification as a means to completion or perfection, a Buddhist understanding of change reflects the idea that goals are not final states but active, ongoing processes. Thus, a change for the better is not a goal that is sought after, but a practical way of being in the world. In other words, change need not be a linear transition from A to B, but rather a way of being from A for B. In support of this point, Hershock suggests that there is a difference between problem solution and predicament resolution, where problem solution is an attempt to control dynamics of change to direct them toward a certain goal, while predicament resolution is a contribution to these dynamics in a certain way.

Making the shift from problem solving to predicament resolution reflects an even further conceptual shift from emphasizing the power to choose one’s goals to the power to invest in and commit oneself to valued processes. By committing ourselves to making a contribution to processes we find valuable, Hershock writes that we seek to embody the Buddhist idea of *kusala* practice—practice that is superlatively or excellently carried out. This is an actively embodied way of changing ourselves that does not have a fixed goal, but is an infinite endeavor. In this way, Hershock seeks to reconceive how we usually go about solving problems like poverty and inequality. The idea of predicament resolution through commitment to *kusala* practices that he introduces in this chapter shapes much of his discussion in the rest of the book.

The middle third of the book uses Hershock’s Buddhist transformations of the concepts of difference, diversity, and change to interpret the history of the modern period, the rise of mass media, and the growth of capitalism, and to analyze how these forces have shaped our contemporary understanding of ethics. Chapter 4 deals

specifically with the type of historical point(s) of view that will “shed *kusala* light on prospects for more equitably orienting our ever-deepening and expanding interdependence” (p. 102). Hershock argues that, while we generally agree on the indeterminacy of the present, the past is indeterminate as well, in that it cannot be understood as conditioning the present in a linear fashion. This entails revising the idea that historical change is separated into contained periods, and recognizing the complex dynamics and events that shape both the past and the present.

Hershock writes that this recognition of historical complexity requires a better sense of the relationship between global politics and global commerce, and he traces much of this history himself. He ultimately argues that by tracing this history we come to recognize the effects that the “time-space compression” of the modern period (e.g., mass migration into small urban areas or the decreased time needed to accomplish small tasks) has had on identity construction, the possibility of social action, and the bias for processes of differentiation (p. 118). Some of the effects are all too recognizable: loss of traditional community bonds, overemphasis on autonomous choice, and self-definition through purchasing products. In other words, these are the values that have emerged from our own complex historical dynamics. If we are to seek change, we must be aware of these patterns and how we contribute to them.

In chapter 5, Hershock analyzes how these modern values have been supported by our relationship with mass media, arguing that approaching media with *kusala* practices in mind requires exchanging consideration of the type of media or content of media that we consume for the way that we interact with it. He finds that one significant trend is the commodification of media consumption. The number of private viewers/listeners/readers attending to any given media outlet has become decisive for media success. Accordingly, media producers are most concerned about securing this attention through audience choice. The complicity between media producers and consumers has supported the increased valuation of an individual’s control over his or her own experience, and the more varied and engrossing the experience the better. This has led to a hyper-differentiation of individual consumers from each other, where any given individual is a member of a number of different communities of media consumption, but it is unlikely that two individuals will both be members of the same set of communities.

According to Hershock, it is necessary to rethink this capitalization of individual attention. While we are kept busy by all of the different media sources that demand our attention, this is attention energy that would be better spent elsewhere, given the increased stress, dissatisfaction, and loneliness that such an attention economy inevitably creates. Here, Hershock returns to the distinction between choice and commitment mentioned earlier. The attention economy finds value in individual choice to the detriment of individual commitment, and so what is needed is a return to the valuation of one’s commitments, rather than finding pleasure in keeping all of one’s options open.

Chapter 6 clarifies what these commitments might look like. Hershock writes that the historical and economic pictures offered by the previous chapters highlight

the forces that are currently exacerbating inequalities and inequities worldwide, and argues that shifting our attention to these complex global issues requires a “difference-sensitive ethicization of the public sphere” (p. 156). Hershock voices opposition to the idea that ethics deals with “independent individuals who enter rationally into social contracts with one another for the primary purpose of maximally securing our own self interest” (p. 159). He uses most of this chapter to develop this point, while seeking to avoid the two extremes of ethical universalism and particularism. This is an important argument, and I suggest that those with an interest in contemporary ethics read it for themselves, as I cannot present it fully here. Suffice to say that the middle path Hershock walks is an intriguing one, and provides sufficient weight to the alternative picture of ethics Hershock paints in chapter 7.

Chapter 7 charts the reaction in ethical theory to the conditions of the Cold War in terms of both rational choice theory and the postmodern emphasis on otherness and difference. However, Hershock finds that both responses are lacking. Rational choice theory focuses on individual choice to the exclusion of commitments and shared communal values, while postmodern theory is unable to escape the idea that ethics involves the relationship between two individuals who, despite their differences, are similar in their individuality. Hershock believes that both theories subscribe to the ideal of the Cosmopolis as a society of equals on a progressive trajectory.¹ In its place, he proposes the ideal of the Netropolis as a world “that is dynamically self-originating and self-regulating—a world in and through which nothing is imposed, in which everything is implicitly subject to autonomously exercised choice, in which differentiation is associated with play and yet understood as necessary, and in which the means-to and meanings-of a good life are irreducibly plural and ever varying” (p. 199). Through this ideal, Hershock seeks to bring together his suggestions for the reconceptualization elucidated in earlier chapters, and offers a compelling alternative to the cosmopolitan worldview.

The next three chapters (the final third of the book) present the possibilities for dealing with poverty and inequity that are opened up by the Buddhist points of view offered in the foregoing chapters and captured by the ideal of the Netropolis. These possibilities include a better appreciation of the relationship between economics and ethics, a shift in emphasis from freedom of choice to dynamic equity or relating freely, and a management of political diversity through improvisation and readiness for change. Chapter 8 suggests how a shift in emphasis from inequality to inequity better takes into account the complex interactions between economics and ethics, leading to the realization that a predicament resolution of these issues entails not generic opportunities to flourish for all, but opportunities to flourish for particular individuals relationally imbedded within communities. This is a shift from recognizing and supporting independence to recognizing and supporting interdependence. Hershock argues that such a shift leads to the appreciation of diversity and an ethics of relational virtuosity.

Chapter 9 strengthens this conception of diversity by analyzing how it is informed by the emerging ideas of Global Commons (GCs) and Global Public Goods (GPGs). Such ideas represent the already shifting current of global attention away

from individual areas of control to complex areas of relational interaction. Hershock argues that we can appropriate this shift for our process of predicament resolution, using the new ideas of GCs and GPGs to “realize and sustain conditions for the *strengthening* and *normative coordination* of relation dynamics as such, both within and among the economic, ecological, and ethical domains” (p. 233). By realizing that GCs and GPGs are relational values rather than “concrete resource pools,” Hershock believes that we open the door for recognizing the importance of diversity and equity as a GC and GPG, making it possible to resolve predicaments by strengthening these emerging values.

Chapter 10 paints a broader picture of the overarching argument of the book as a whole, presenting it as a move to seeing politics as poetic, or “a deeply metaphorical process of cantilevering bridges out from the actual and familiar in the direction of the unknown and yet to be” (p. 242). Hershock looks at how we might support such poetic creation of new political possibilities, arguing that this support entails the “shared realization of a distinctive ‘structure of feeling’” (p. 250) that is not a nationalistic spirit or the spirit of an age, but a mutual contribution to the “amplification of our differences” (p. 251). This is a politics of recognition and respect as opposed to one of identity. In the idea of “improvisational readiness,” Hershock captures the sense that this politics entails not pinning down relations as known and familiar, but being ready for the creative unfolding of the person, group, or nation to which one is relating. Hershock argues that this is a much more effective means of conflict resolution than seeking to know and prepare for the other’s next move. Such conflict resolution relies on neither shared means of deliberation nor common goods, but on cooperation and coordination between politically diverse entities. Thus, in this final chapter, Hershock captures his arguments throughout the book in the suggestion that dealing with poverty and inequality means reconceiving political thinking as a whole, not just thinking about specific issues. This new political thinking replaces the politics of identity with the politics of recognition and respect.

Finally, Hershock offers an epilogue that brings the foregoing reflections to bear on the events of the so-called Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movement. He writes that, in different ways, both highlight the necessity of seeing such occurrences as indicative of global predicaments in need of a creative resolution that can account for the dynamics of global interdependence, and the fact that this need has not yet been met. Thus, Hershock ends the book on the realistic and optimistic note that if we recognize the global predicament we are in and reflect on the means to resolution, we will be able to develop practices that sustain *kusala* arcs of change.

This review has focused attention on the organization and key points of the arguments that Hershock makes in *Valuing Diversity*, and, as should be clear from the foregoing, these arguments are many. Throughout all of them Hershock uses extensive references, and while these references situate and provide support for Hershock’s main points, at times they take away from the reader’s sense of Hershock’s own point of view and what he finds to be important. Indeed, one of the clearest and most

revelatory parts of the book comes in the final chapter, where Hershock recounts the moment when he first realized the importance of commitment to responsive virtuosity. I will not spoil the experience of reading this narrative; it will suffice to say that for many readers the import of the book will congeal at exactly this point. However, Hershock seems reticent about including such a personal story in a philosophical work:

Especially when told in the first person, a story like this might easily be dismissed as the recounting of a melodramatic instant that is philosophically and politically impotent with respect to our tasks of discerning an original sense of readiness for relational improvisation and somehow realizing the emergence of a politics of diversity. (p. 262)

That Hershock does include this story in the book shows that he is not one of those who would easily dismiss it, and that he does indeed recognize its philosophical and political value. However, it seems that Hershock's worry about the danger of recounting this story highlights a missed opportunity of this book. This is the fact that, as Hershock writes on the final page of the epilogue, "it is time to stop talking about diversity and equity" (p. 293). What is somewhat unclear is how Hershock conceives of the transition from talking to acting. While he states that "there is no shortage of opportunities for activating our differences as the basis of mutual contribution to sustained and more equitably shared flourishing" (p. 293), and presents numerous arguments and conceptual tools for why we should and how we might rethink difference, the path from talking about diversity to actively seeking to realize it remains obscure. Inclusion of a greater number of personal and firsthand narratives (whether his own or those of others) would have been effective in demonstrating the ways in which people do recognize and seize these opportunities.

That being said, Hershock writes in the introduction that "this book develops a more theoretically robust conception of diversity" (p. 1), and as a theoretical undertaking, the book is entirely successful. The arguments for change and the sorts of conceptualizations that are employed in these arguments are timely and well-presented, making this work an important contribution to the growing conversation about the need for a perspective that, avoiding the twin dangers of universalism and particularism, responsibly deals with emerging issues and predicaments in our global and interdependent world. On the whole, this is a valuable book and an important step towards bridging the gap between academic arguments and contemporary predicaments.

Note

1 – Hershock conceives of the cosmopolis as the utopian vision of the modern age (p. 189), but does not mention the idea of cosmopolitanism championed by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (W. W. Norton, 2006). Appiah writes that cosmopolitanism consists of two intertwining strands: that we have obligations to distant others ("strangers") and that we take seriously the value of particular human lives. To be cosmopolitan is therefore to have respect for difference and find value in diversity, while at the same time recognizing that human beings have responsibility for

each other (Appiah, pp. xv–xvii). Given the significant overlap in topics, it would be interesting to know what Herschok thinks about Appiah’s version of cosmopolitanism, and whether it is the same as the idea of cosmopolis discussed here.

The Unlikely Buddhologist: Tiantai Buddhism in Mou Zongsan’s New Confucianism. By Jason Clower. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Pp. xvi + 279. Hardcover \$146.00, €113.00, ISBN 978-9-004-17737-6.

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Is Mou Zongsan, an important twentieth-century Confucian scholar, relevant for Western readers? Jason Clower gives an affirmative answer in his book *The Unlikely Buddhologist: Tiantai Buddhism in Mou Zongsan’s New Confucianism*: Mou could at least offer, from a different perspective, inspiration to Westerners on issues relating to morality, happiness, and the relationship between value and being. Clower chooses to introduce these issues from the vantage point of Mou’s reading of Tiantai Buddhism, for he finds Mou’s extolling of Buddhism intriguing, given his strong Confucian affiliation, and attempts to offer an informed account of Mou’s (Tiantai) Buddhist studies.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first states the author’s aim in studying Mou’s interpretation of Tiantai Buddhism, together with an introduction to Mou’s times and his objectives, as well as the New Confucian agenda; the second focuses on Mou’s “two-level ontology,” the philosophical framework that underlies his philosophizing; the third and fourth present Mou’s interpretation of Buddhist philosophies in the light of Tiantai Buddhism; the fifth and sixth explicate Mou’s assessment of Buddhism. It is only in the final chapter that Clower attempts an appraisal of how Mou uses Buddhist philosophy.

Investigating Mou’s philosophy, which encompasses the philosophies of China, Buddhism, and the West, has always been a daunting task, and Mou’s somewhat obscure terminologies and convoluted argumentation add to the difficulty. Against this background, Clower’s informative exposition of Mou’s buddhology is a commendable achievement. Together with his adept use of analogies and more mundane examples to drive home many of Mou’s ideas, he allows readers interested in Chinese and Buddhist philosophies yet unfamiliar with Mou to be initiated more easily into his system of thought without losing sight of his limitations. Readers also can get at least a glimpse into a sophisticated reading of Buddhism by a great philosophical mind of modern China that offers them a novel and controversial perspective for understanding Chinese Buddhism.

Unlike many critics of Mou, Clower exhibits sufficient intellectual sympathy with Mou’s project and tries to clarify what may sometimes seem mysterious and confusing in many of Mou’s terminologies and concepts. His “defense” of Mou against Fung Yiu-ming’s criticism is illustrative of this, and serves to introduce readers to a