of technology may employ. In this way, Smith shows how mapping, as a method, should be a collaborative and open-ended enterprise, and not a way to aim at an absolute God's eye view. His ultimate aim seems to be to keep the debate open to different theories, approaches and disciplines.

As a last point closer to the interest of EJJP readers, *Exceptional Technologies* explicitly acknowledges that adopting a picture of mapping as philosophical method enables the possibility to explore and draw from different philosophical traditions, whether continental, analytic or non-Western. Yuk Hui has indeed started to pave the way in this direction with his 2016 *The Question Concerning Technology in China*. The interest in Japanese and other non-Western philosophies can be bolstered precisely by viewing philosophy as a kind of contingent mapping of the conceptual spaces it inhabits. When comparative philosophers, like cartographers, communicate the results of their forays into the "thoughtscapes" of different cultures, they enrich the philosophical debate with fresh and original views, broadening the range of theories and concepts that philosophers can adopt and adapt to tackle contemporary issues.

In conclusion, Dominic Smith's book presents an interesting and promising continental approach to provide timely analyses of concrete technologies, while making a case for broadening the philosophical method to include alternative approaches and cross-disciplinary work. As a small critical note, perhaps for a follow-up work, it would have been interesting to read a chapter-long elaboration of Foucault's discussion of the panopticon, which I think represents a honorable precedent that illustrates how the mapping of an exceptional technology could be conducted, and makes a strong case in support of Smith's approach.

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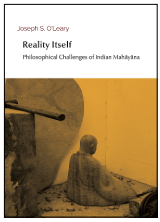

Joseph S. O'Leary, *Reality Itself: Philosophical Challenges of Indian Mahāyāna*

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ISBN: 978–1798750551

With *Reality Itself: Philosophical Challenges of Indian Mahāyāna*, we have before us a highly complex book that deals with Christianity, European philosophy, and Buddhism. In 15 chapters (some of which are based on previous publications), Joseph S. O'Leary endeavors on the path of interreligious understanding, a quest that is given in by his observation that the contemporary world "blithely ignores its

(i.e. of religion) discourse, marginalizing it as an obsolete fantasy." The question is therefore raised whether "philosophies, proceeding by reason only, and with a freedom untrammeled by any dogmatic loyalty or soteriological urgency, [can] come to the aid of religion as it seeks a bridge to a faithless world?" (p. 13).

In this "philosophy coming to the rescue of religion," or, as Joseph S. O'Leary calls it, a "new dialogal space in which the Christian Gospel engages not only with Western modernity but equally with Eastern religious wisdom" (p. 16), a special role is given to Buddhism (also a rediscovery of Judaism, "a tradition from which Christianity has been estranged for two millennia" (p. 144) is suggested, but this is not further developed). The importance of Buddhism for "a revised self-understanding" of Christianity (p. 145) is its quality of empowerment and liberation, i.e., Buddhism is seen as able to deconstruct the Christian interpretation of God as "a macro-substance, an impregnable identity, a secure foundation, to which one must cling, and which constricts the freedom of the spirit" (p. 21). O'Leary refers to Hume here, whose "attitude seems to betoken a failed encounter with Buddhism, of which he embraced the skeptical radicalism but missed the creative liberty that flows from this" (p. 335). For the author, a Buddhist deconstruction of the Christian God would not mean that the biblical God would disappear into the Buddhist "emptiness," but would assert the Christian God's identity in a fresh way, that is, more real in terms of the contemporary age (p. 21). This intellectual exercise would, moreover, "temper the elements of fixation, irrationality, emotivity, and violence in Christian thinking, and present a peaceful, reasonable, wholesome mode of being" (p. 91).

This purpose explains the centrality of the concepts "compassion" and "forgiveness" in the present book. Although Buddhism "does not conceive ultimate truth or reality in the guise of a personal God" (p. 52), which makes the notion of "forgiveness" rather alien to it, the Buddhist notion that "there is no permanent identity in either the offender or the offended" (p. 56), enables Buddhism to forgive in the form of compassion (*karuṇā*) that is based on "realizing the equality of oneself and others" (p. 57). (O'Leary (p. 118, n. 1) remarks that "Hegel would be in full accord with this: the mind whose adventures are followed throughout the *Phenomenology of Mind* is never the same from one station to the next; its being is dependently arising, in function of the successive relational constellations in which it figures.")

Because Buddhism sees itself as "a conventional construct," the Buddhist adherent sees himself ultimately thrown back to oneself, i.e., to the "conventional, samsaric world, now lived in awareness of its emptiness" (p. 190). This phenomenon is not alien to Christianity, in which "anything approaching an immediate mystical grasp of the divine, or any effort to articulate the ungraspable divine essence, even with the refined techniques of negative theology, meets a reversal whereby we are sent back to the human world, in line with the logic of the Incarnation" (p. 190).

Given the approach of the present book, an interesting link could have been made here with the famous Buddhist reformer Taixu (1889–1947). Greatly inspired by the Christian ideal of charity, Taixu's so-called 人間佛教 (Buddhism for the human society) advocated that a "Buddhist paradise" was not something of the afterlife, but that it was this world that had to be transformed into a (Buddhist) paradise. As Taixu stated:

> One in no way has to instruct people to leave mankind and become a spirit or that everyone should go forth and enter monastic life or retreat on a mountain or in the woods to be a monk.... One should improve society with the Buddhist principles and make sure that mankind makes progress. It is a Buddhism that improves the world.[1]

This opinion of Taixu's comes close to O'Leary's claim that "Faith and religion have not emerged unscathed from the ordeal of modernity; rather their meaning is radically altered, through a critical step back from doctrinal affirmation to this prior level of engagement with the real. Faith is less a matter of subscription to tenets than of an orientation in regard to reality itself; religion becomes a repertory of skillful means for engaging with reality itself" (p. 26).

The nature of O'Leary's quest also justifies a reference to Ralph Weber, who defines the *tertium comparationis* as one of four aspects in standard conceptualizations of comparison: (1) a comparison is always done by someone, (2) at least two *relata* (*comparata*) are compared, (3) the *comparata* are compared in some respect (*tertium comparationis*), and (4) the result of a comparison is a relation between the *comparata* on the basis of the chosen respect. He further states: "There is a *tertium* already required to determine the *comparata*, and insofar as that determination precedes the comparison that *tertium* may be thought of as "precomparative."[2] That is to say, for O'Leary's "warm ecumenical understanding" (p. 16), as he calls his endeavor to revitalize Christianity through Buddhism, to be *überhaupt* meaningful, it is necessary that some common ground ("find harmony in the preservation of diversity" between the "Christian Gospel," "Western modernity," and "Eastern religious wisdom" is presupposed (p. 1). Or, as he states, "Only when one is really gripped by some elements in the other religion does dialogue move toward the real" (p. 16).

That Western philosophies and especially some strands of Buddhist philosophy (Madhyamaka for the philosophical approach (chapters 9, 10 and 11 of the book)

1. Taixu 太虛, 怎樣來建設人間佛教, [How to establish Buddhism for the human world], in 『太虛大師全書』 [Complete works of Venerable Master Taixu] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 1956/2005), vol. 14, 支論 [Supporting treatises], nr. 6.

2. Ralph Weber, "Comparative Philosophy and the Tertium: Comparing What with What, and in What respect?," *Dao* 13 (2014): 151–71; citations from pp. 152 and 154.

and the Heart Sūtra and *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* for Buddhism in practice (chapters 5–8 of the book) are chosen to come "to the rescue of the Christian faith" excludes—probably involuntarily—the possibility to develop the present intellectual exercise further into a search for a true "civil religion" as Bellah has defined it .[3] Such a "civil religion" may be much more needed in the contemporary global world than a revitalization of Christianity as such is. In this regard, we may also mention Kim and Ivanhoe's characterization of civil religion as something that "can be promoted but never officially founded, sanctioned, or supported: it can and must draw upon particular historical religious traditions but must never speak from or represent any such tradition or school.... It must remain somewhat enigmatic in form and open to ongoing revision and development."[4] The possibility of going beyond a mere revitalization of Christianity (as the author states: "Our belonging to 'reality itself' sets the basic context of all dialogue, in which one talks to the other not as Christian to Buddhist or vice versa, but as one person to another sharing basic human questions" (p. 27) is, however, embryonically present.

Two technical remarks are the following: The statement that the Buddha "constructed a very different style of religious insight and teaching" (p. 301) against the Veda, has been put into question.[5] Also the statement that "it was easy to rewrite Indian Buddhist ideas in Chinese terms in the first reception of Buddhism in China with its policy of 'matching concepts'" (p. 363) has been contested.[6]

In conclusion, *Reality itself. Philosophical Challenges of Indian Mahāyāna* is the work of a pondering mind that definitely has the merit of an open approach to Christian dogma. More than "a Buddhist-led ecumenism in which critical debate between all parties allows the Indian sources to challenge anew the Sinitic traditions, and vice versa, and where a similar engagement between Buddhism and Christianity will unfold without fear" (p. 319), this reader would have appreciated an attempt to take the intellectual exercise one step further, into the possibilities for a world "civil religion."

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3. Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," DAEDALUS 96/1 (1967): 1–21.

4. Sungmoon Kim and Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Introduction" to *Confucianism, A Habit of the Heart: Bellah, Civil Religion, and East Asia* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 1–6; citation, p. 6.

5. See Johannes Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha: Study in the Culture of Early India*, Handbook of Oriental Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2007), section 2, "South Asia."

6. See Victor Mair, "What is Geyi After All?" in Alan Chan and Y. K. Lo, eds., *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 227–64.