Robert MAGLIOLA, *Derrida on the Mend*, Purdue University Press, 1984, 238 pp. $18.00.

The core of this book is its brilliantly argued correlation of "Derridean differentialism" and "Buddhist differentialism." Magliola seeks out the fundamental quandaries of Derrida's thought with the flair of a detective, and goes on to show that Buddhist *śūnyatā*, as explicated by Nāgārjuna, contains the clue to a resolution of these quandaries. As far as I know, Magliola is the first person to study Derrida in a Buddhist perspective, and he does this with a higher degree of speculative engagement than has been attained in similar studies of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Bergson. Unfortunately, instead of devoting the whole book to the encounter of Derrida and Nāgārjuna, Magliola adds literary critical discussions which

hark back to his earlier *Phenomenology and Literature* (Purdue, 1977); a discussion of Heidegger as a quasi-Taoist logocentric mystic which to my mind quite misses the figure in the Heideggerian carpet; and a concluding chapter on "Christian differentialism" which tries to sublate all that has gone before into the circumincessional language of classical trinitarian speculation as well as into that of mystical paradox in the manner of Angelus Silesius. There is more than a whiff of "magisterial fundamentalism" in this chapter, which depends heavily on Denzinger, Rahner, and Lonergan, and exhibits little awareness of the hermeneutic issues of a critical history of dogma.

Magliola's exposition of Derrida has been acclaimed as the best in English. Indeed, it is the only account I know which brings an alert and independent questioning mind to bear on Derrida's arguments, a mind which at times seems to play Kierkegaard to Derrida's Hegel. That is in refreshing contrast to the slavish jargonizing of most Derrideans. Not all of Magliola's emphases are fully convincing however. I think he overstates the importance of self-identity for Derrida: "Derrida's endeavor is best taken as an assault upon the principle of self-identity . . . (He) quickly reduces all issues of self-identity to the issue of personal self-identity. . . He feels he can, step by step, 'close in' on the citadel which is personal consciousness" (pp. 5, 6). I should have thought Derrida worked from the reverse direction, using the Freudian (or Nietzschean or Marxian) subversion of the cogito, as a starting point for discovering an analogous dehiscence between intended identities and actual betrayals of identity in every field, and in the texture of all discourse; this unending deferral and differentiation of identity constitutes what Derrida calls *différance*, which can be seen as an incurably wounded avatar of Hegelian dialectic. (Magliola never refers to Hegel, yet the ghost of the arch-dialectician beckons mutely in the background to this showdown between the still archer dialecticians, Derrida and Nāgārjuna, and it seems perverse of the archer than arch puppet-master of the whole show, Magliola, to ignore him.)

Magliola helpfully expounds Derrida's position in a series of logical steps, beginning from the Saussurean principle of the arbitrariness of signs, radicalized by Derrida in the claim that all is "writing." From the leveling of signifiers one proceeds to the leveling of signifieds: "In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools,

and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition of itself to its image" (Derrida, quoted p. 9). Magliola develops this topic richly and concludes that it leads to the radical claim that "the whole theory of the 'sign,' of 'signified and signifier' - whether it is functioning in the principle of identity, or in the principle of personal self-identity, or in formal linguistics itself - is null and void" (p. 18). What Magliola diagnoses as Derrida's quandary already begins to loom, for to preserve the coherence of the everyday world Derrida has to preserve referentiality in some form or other, and hence is obliged to introduce the notion of the "signified under erasure." "Like a palimpsest, the 'erased' thought still shows some of its authentic markings" (p. 18). But perhaps Magliola exaggerates Derrida's difficulties in introducing the notion of "absolute negative reference" as an account of how signs signify in Derrida (p. 21). I found this notion rather obscure, and savoring more of Nāgārjuna than of Derrida. Derrida, I imagine, is sufficiently Hegelian to maintain that signs signify only by their difference from other signs without losing all grip on the positive coherence of significations in everyday life. "The everyday mind normally does not interpret a knock on the door as a green feather settling in a Brazilian jungle. However, pure, i.e., absolute negative reference, excludes ipso facto any *fil conducteur*, and connecting thoughts according to any 'thread' since every 'thing' is in *absolutely no way* like any other" (p. 26). Is this a necessary implication of Derrida's thought? Could Magliola be influenced here by the fashionable literary critical image of Derrida as one who simply pulverizes meaning and reference? I imagine that Derrida would sharply reject the imputation, though of course he could be unaware of the latent implications of his procedures. Here at least are his own words: "It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. . . . Certainly, deconstruction tries to show that the question of reference is much more complex and problematic than traditional theories supposed . . . . I totally refuse the label of nihilism which has been ascribed to me and my American colleagues." (Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. 123, 124. The same interview gives reason to qualify Magliola's view that Derrida is dismissive towards Christian

theology: "What we know as Christian and Jewish theology today is a cultural ensemble which has already been largely 'Hellenized'. . . . One can argue that [the] original heterogeneous elements of Judaism and Christianity were never completely eradicated by Western metaphysics. They perdure throughout the centuries, threatening and unsettling the assured 'identities' of Western philosophy" [pp. 116-17]. Insofar as Magliola tries to "restore" a certain logocentric theological discourse, I feel Derrida still has the best of the argument.)

Nāgārjuna shows that "a carefully reasoned logocentrism leads to pure negative reference. One must conclude, then, that all happenings being utterly dependent, must be empty of self-nature and empty of entitative transfer or continuance. . . . Within this logocentric frame [happenings] are *totally* other-caused, or 'pure effects'; or they are 'not-caused,' and thus *not* 'effects' at all. But these . . . options . . . logic compels us in turn to put under erasure. . . . Nāgārjuna's language . . . strains to present a process of ongoing, ever-altering dependency. And this slide of pure dependency which is forever without originating cause is *śūnyatā*" (pp. 115, 116). This quotation instantiates the suggestivity and complexity of Magliola's reading of Nāgārjuna in light of Derrida. How does Nāgārjuna rescue Derrida from his quandary? Apparently by providing an ontological foundation to the play of *différance* in *śūnyatā* mystically apprehended. On the basis of this, logocentric discourse can be maintained once again, but in freedom: "The goings-on 'constitute' along a range of possibilities, from devoidness (where there is no objectifying) through a gradually crystallizing entitativeness and on to the most elaborate of logocentric formulae. . . . Language/behavior is, then, a constituting which moves towards greater and greater objectification (or 'making of objects' including one's 'self'). The Buddhist 'wise man' dissolves objectification, at will, when he becomes the going-on at work in a devoid (off/entitative) way" (pp. 124-25). I remain doubtful if this integrated vision really meets Derridean concerns. How does it relate to the phenomenon of irreducible pluralism, the mutual solicitation of discourses, which shatters every unifying Logos? Derrida's semantic concerns scarcely admit of resolution by a leap to transcendental consciousness. They belong to the texture of Western intellectual history and inspire a ferment of critical commentary within that texture. Contemplative insight might well be a flight from the critical task with which Derrida busies

himself. I wonder what Derrida will make of the nostrum with which Magliola leaves him: "(1) while the Derridean alternately celebrates and anguishes, hopes and waxes nostalgic, the Nāgārjunist is aware and serene, and has the security which comes with liberation; (2) while the Derridean performs the logocentric and differential self-consciously and piecemeal, the Nāgārjunist performs them by means of a grace which is spontaneous but 'at will,' a kind of off/self that moves freely between the objectivism of ego and pure devoidness" (p. 126).

I make no claim to resolve these or any of the many other challenges posed by this provocative work. It is essential reading for students of Derrida and will be of interest to all who are intrigued by the ultimate epistemological issues raised by Buddhism.

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Robert Magliola's *Derrida on the Mend* is a bold endeavor. It engages one's interest and immerses one in a net of language both elusive and opaque, for Magliola's intent is to place all discourse under a Derridean erasure. If language, the structuring of logocentrism, is enunciated under such a constant erasure, one can hardly complain that it does not meet ordinary norms of rhetorical lucidity. Rather it is intended to elicit in the reader a conversion away from an illusory logocentric pattern where subjectively understood words represent objective identities and essences. To what then is one converted?

Magliola, finding Derrida inadequate to this question, appeals to the Mādhyamikan notion of suchness. I limit my focus to the section, Part III, which is devoted to a discussion of Buddhist Differentialism, for the boldness and creativity of the endeavor is drawn from the attempt to employ Buddhist thought in the service of Christian theology. I find Magliola's Derridean interpretation of Nāgārjuna's Middle Path both creative and cogent, but by reading Nāgārjuna apart from his context within the development of Mahāyāna thinking, Magliola is led to overlook what is perhaps an even more creative Buddhist way of understanding doctrine, i.e., the Yogācāra thought of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.

Although Magliola says that he will place "Nāgārjuna in rela-

tion to his immediate historical predecessors, contemporaries, and successors" (p. 89), yet in fact he abstracts Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika thought from the flow of Mahāyāna doctrinal discourse in order to relate it directly to Derrida's thinking. He barely mentions the Prajñāpāramitā movement which constituted the immediate source and context for all Nāgārjuna's writings. He misinterprets Abhidharma, which not only held the five *skandhas* to be objectively real, but composed lengthy dharma-lists of elemental truths held objectively to exist, and he short-shrifts Yogācāra, dismissing it as "idealist and, most would agree, patently logocentric," (p. 92) or as "pure idealism (absolute mind)" (p. 94). Thus he makes the startling claim that "without Derrida it is difficult for a 'moderner' to understand Nāgārjuna!" (p. 93). But the difficulty in understanding Nāgārjuna, or for that matter any ancient thinker, results from the difficulty in understanding the inter-textual web of meanings within which he thought and wrote. Magliola's procedure of moving from Nāgārjuna (and then only the *Mādhyamakārikā* text) directy to Zen, and then interpreting the basic notions of Middle Path, emptiness, etc. from a Derridean slant loses sight of the historical development of Mahāyāna discourse and, concomitantly, the possibility of reclaiming the richness of that development for Christian theologizing.

The Prajñapāramitā scriptures thoroughly rejected logocentric, metaphysical Abhidharma thinking, thus posing a problem for all subsequent Mahāyāna doctrinal discourse. Nāgārjuna, who lived and thought immediately after that Prajñapāramitā movement, engaged in dialogue with Abhidharma-like realists and presented his notion of emptiness as a skillful means to deconstruct such logocentric realism. But, although he clearly stated the need for conventional doctrinal discourse (*saṃvṛti-satya*), it was not clear to later people just how that discourse was to be performed. It fell to the Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra thinkers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu to grapple with the question of the nature and limits of doctrinal discourse. It is within the classical Yogācāra of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu that a critical understanding of conscious understanding and a critical hermeneutic of emptiness was developed. In his *Summary of the Great Vehicle* (See Étienne Lamotte, *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, Louvain 1973, vol. 2, p. 32) Asaṅga summarizes his understanding of Mahāyāna doctrine under the themes of dependent co-arising, dependently co-arisen states, and an interpretation of the meaning of what has been declared in the scriptures. The

first and second themes (treated in the first two chapters) identify and ground dependent co-arising (i.e., emptiness) within consciousness as the basic pattern (*paratantra*) whereby the container consciousness imbued with the seeds of language arises in reciprocal dependence with the active consciousnesses of thinking and sensing and whereby insight arises in tandem with image. But that insight-image pattern becomes illusory and imaged (*parikalpita*) when taken as a real subject apprehending a real object. In fact any such logocentric thinking, any attempt to identify objectively real essences is illusory and negated through insight into emptiness, which, once attained through a basic conversion of consciousness, realizes that all named, imagined realities, all ideas are only (*mātra*) conscious constructs (*vijñapti*) evolved through the permeations of language upon our awareness. In his third theme Asaṅga recommends the application of such a critical understanding of understanding to the task of interpreting the meaning of the scriptures and developing doctrinal discourse within the context of emptiness. Such a critical hermeneutic grew in response to a negatively perceived deconstruction of doctrine, and may perhaps on that account parallel similar Christian questions about the validity of doctrinal discourse.

Yogācāra is not idealist, as Magliola claims, giving as his source three pages from *The Sources of Chinese Tradition* (vol. 1, pp. 303-6), which not only is not the work of Buddhologists or Buddhist scholars, but which does not even purport to treat Indian thought. Rather Yogācāra is a negation of the imagined pattern that takes a subject (*grāhaka*) to know an object (*grāhya*) within a critical understanding of consciousness as dependently co-arisen and empty. It is not a rejection of the object in favor of the subject, but of the imagined pattern that dichotomizes them one from the other as distinct realities. The theme of *vijñapti-mātra* (conscious construction only) means that all provisional designations (Nāgārjuna's *prajñapti*) are grounded as conditional, other-dependent constructs of consciousness. Meaning is not a property of real external things, but a constructive function of language-formed understanding. It can thus be valid only as conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and always remains under the negation of ultimate meaning (*paramārtha*), which, although intending that ultimate meaning, can never capture it in verbal fabrications.

It does seem to be true that some Yogācāra thinkers both before and after Asaṅga at times interpreted ultimate meaning as

an absolute reality. The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkarā* describes it as the only really existent reality (11:14) and Paramārtha's translations often introduce the Tathāgātagarbha notion of the originally pure seed into Yogācāra themes. Such texts may well be criticized as logocentric, but Asaṅga and Vasubandhu seem hardly guilty of these indiscretions. Thus Magliola's claim that most agree (who are these agreers?) that Yogācāra is logocentric is inaccurate, for it applies, at most, to one particular lineage within Yogācāra.

The same holds for his assertion that Yogācāra is a pure idealism of absolute mind. Asaṅga asserts that consciousness refers to the eight consciousnesses (*ālaya* and the seven *pravṛtti-vijñāna*) of individual sentient beings. Neither he, nor Vasubandhu, nor the latter Indian commentators, refer to a single archetypical consciousness, although the Chinese context with its heavy early reliance upon Paramārtha may be understood at times to teach such a notion.

I would suggest then that, rather than following Magliola's progress from Derrida through Mādhyamika to Christian discourse, one can employ Yogācāra directly as a hermeneutical framework for any doctrinal discourse, Buddhist or Christian. Yogācāra arose in an historical context which brought the very possibility of doctrinal discourse into radical doubt. However, it developed within a religious context and focused upon the implications of conversion and awakening for the enunciation of doctrine. It may, in the end, not only be more fruitful for the interpretation of Christian religious themes, but also may better enable one to understand Derrida.

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