
Graham PARKES, ed., *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991. 253 pp. Cloth \$31.75. ISBN 0-226-64683-1.

This sequel to the same editor's *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (1987) has perhaps a less promising topic. Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics does not issue in a respectful listening to the other "great beginnings" as Heidegger's does, and his existential attitude resonates less strongly with Eastern spirituality. Reading Zen or Taoism one finds oneself murmuring, "a touch of Heidegger there," and vice versa. But Nietzsche's loftiest passages suggest only a reformation of Schopenhauer and Wagner, braced by a meditation on ancient Greece. He is close to Buddhism only in his analysis of the delusions of ego, but this does not bring him to the calm of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

The comparativist essays in this volume generally err in finding analogies to Asian wisdom in Nietzsche, where a critique of Nietzsche from an Asian perspective might have brought the contours of his thought into sharper focus. Joan Stambaugh's claim that the poetic mysticism of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* "has nothing to do with Schopenhauer's will-less contemplation" but is closer to Dōgen's "to forget one's self is to be confirmed by all dharmas" (p. 27) in-

volves a gratuitous leap; Nietzsche's ecstatic experience of "falling into the well of eternity" (NIETZSCHE 1980, vol. 4, p. 344) is not as close to Zen as the "letting be" that Heidegger developed in opposition to Nietzsche. A Christian critique of *Zarathustra* has not yet been formulated, still less a Buddhist one: both are important tasks facing contemporary spirituality, and Heidegger might provide a starting point for both.

Chen Guying's "Zhuang Zhi and Nietzsche" flounders in generalities: "Both thinkers emphasize the importance of spiritual freedom. Their notions of freedom should not be confused with the concept of legal freedoms, but are rather literary and aesthetic notions" (p. 127). Equally lame is Ōkōchi Ryōgi's comparison between Nietzsche's de-anthropomorphized view of nature and "the East Asian idea of *shizen* . . . the spontaneous way of being of all things," an idea that, unlike the Western idea of nature, has undergone no historical development "since this kind of developmental-historical thinking has always been foreign to the Japanese" (p. 204). The hermeneutical unsophistication revealed in those last words allows Lao Zi, Shinran, Nishida, and Van Gogh to be conflated, and Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Hegel, Spinoza, and the medieval thinkers are somehow dragged in as well. More focused is Roger T. Ames's contrast between Nietzschean will to power—a cosmological and existential force-field that is "a calculus of contesting forces" (p. 148)—and Chinese "virtuality" (*de*), "a variable field or focus of potency in the process of existence" (p. 136) that is not marked by conflict of perspectives but rather "enables the person of extending *de* to integrate broadly and to be everywhere responsive and efficacious" (p. 148).

Glen T. Martin's fine accounts of Nietzsche and Nāgārjuna as deconstructors of metaphysics issue in a confrontation of the two via Nishitani's interpretation of *śūnyatā*. Both Nietzsche and Nishitani use the metaphor of "play" to indicate "a being-in-the-world transformed in such a way that its existence is no longer a burden to itself" (p. 107). A closer parallel with Nāgārjuna is provided by "an unprecedented non-duality between human action, language, and grammar, on the one hand, and the world on the other. Thus there is for Nietzsche no metaphysical residue of the way the world is apart from the ways we do and can talk about it except for its sheer 'becoming' which is 'formless' and 'unformulable'" (p. 108). Perhaps Martin is too quick to associate this with "the non-dual standpoint of *śūnyatā*" (p. 109), thus closing the space of tension in which a Buddhist critique of Nietzsche's discourse might take shape.

According to Arifuku Kōgaku, "If one takes 'becoming'—as both Nietzsche and the Buddhists do—as the only reality, one can no longer expect the categories of reason to work at all in the struggle to attain truth" (p. 216)—a statement that seems to me untrue in itself, and I would like to think untrue of Nietzsche and Buddhism as well. The somatic nature of zazen is correlated with Nietzsche's "I am body entirely, and nothing besides; and soul is only a word for something about the body" (pp. 220–21). But isn't this a perilous conflation, leaving room neither for a Zen critique of Nietzschean materialism nor for a critical Zen retrieval of a possible Nietzschean spirituality? Sonoda Muneto dwells on Zarathustra's pregnant silence about eternal recurrence:

“Nietzsche had to compose *Zarathustra* in order to provide a unique site in which to communicate this most difficult of thoughts” (p. 234). He finds a striking parallel with the dramatization of Vimalakirti’s silence; but let us note that Nietzsche’s mastery of quasi-religious rhetoric in no way guarantees that the notion of eternal recurrence constitutes a substantial revelation or enlightenment. Zarathustra may be a failed bodhisattva.

How well did Nietzsche know Asian thought? Johann Figl shows that his early schooling aroused interest in the relations between Indian and German epic, and that as a university student he saw the development from Brahmanism to Buddhism in terms of “deeper submersion into pantheistic nihilism” (p. 59). Michel Hulin claims that after these early Schopenhauerian impressions, he read some works about Buddhism in the 1870s but acquired a better knowledge of Brahmanism only in the 1880s, chiefly from his friend DEUSSEN’s *Das System des Vedānta* (1883). Despite occasional flashes of insight, he remained “a prisoner of a certain stereotypical image of India carried by the culture of his time” (p. 66). Arbitrary stylization of Buddhist data suggests that he did not study Oldenberg’s classic work of 1881 (p. 72). Mervyn Sprung’s examination of Nietzsche’s library revealed that his copy of this work “appears never to have been opened” (p. 77), though he refers to it briefly in the *Nachlass* of 1884 (NIETZSCHE 1980, vol. 11, pp. 207–208), as Sonoda Muneto notes (p. 227).

Sprung traces Nietzsche’s scanty quotations from Indian literature to Deussen, the *Upanishads*, the *Laws of Manu*, and one or two Buddhist texts such as the *Dhammapada* and the *Sutta Nipāta*. “He betrays no awareness of a Buddhist philosophy beyond the doctrine of release from suffering” (p. 82). His annotations on Schopenhauer reveal hardly any interest in that author’s Indological lore. In correspondence with Deussen he shows no curiosity about the latter’s researches; this is “the most crucial evidence we have of Nietzsche’s lack of interest in trans-European ideas” (p. 84). “Ideas from India penetrated Nietzsche as little as drops of water penetrate a goose’s feathers” (p. 89). Sprung thus undercuts Welbon’s claim that Nietzsche, who had “carefully studied” Oldenberg in 1881, was more “solidly grounded in Buddhism” than Schopenhauer, and casts doubt on his association of Uebermensch and Tathāgata (WELBON 1968, pp. 186, 188). Indeed, it may be that Nietzsche’s undeserved reputation as an Indian scholar has been one of the obstacles to a reception of Indian thought in the West. (Conversely, how fortunate that he was dissuaded from using the Buddha rather than Zarathustra as his mouthpiece; and that Wagner dropped his planned Buddhist music-drama for *Parsifal*!)

This picture is confirmed by Eberhard Scheiffele’s account of Nietzsche’s use of “the foreign” as “a moment in a hermeneutic strategy of distancing for the purpose of better self-understanding” (p. 10). “It is for Nietzsche less a case of ‘doing justice to’ what is foreign than of seeing one’s own *anew* from a different perspective” (p. 33). This has always been a major function of the presence of Asian culture in the West, and Western residents in the Far East rarely get beyond this to a real immersion in the alien element. But Nietzsche sought the alien element chiefly in ancient Greece, with an emphasis on its debts to Egypt and Asia (p. 39); the cultures of Asia did not take form for him as a positive counter-image to the West (p. 40). The qualities of Buddhism are dra-

gooned into his critique of Christianity: “the absence of a concept of a personal God, ‘positivism,’ ‘phenomenalism,’ a stance ‘beyond good and evil,’ no ‘compulsion,’ no ‘attacks on those who think otherwise,’ a doctrine that ‘counters the feeling of *ressentiment*,’ a healthy way of life, and the rejection of the concepts of the individual soul and the ego” (p. 41). Only from the outside can we see ourselves; this makes the outsider the true insider. Nietzsche’s perspectivism is not relativism, but the multiplication of such perspectives from the outside.

The story of the Chinese reception of Nietzsche, as told by David Kelly, is more fascinating as a social and cultural chronicle than for any light it sheds on Nietzsche, who is reduced to slogans in an excessively politicized context. “There is a disappointing blindness to Nietzsche’s literary strategies and use of irony” (p. 167). Parkes’s account of the Japanese reception is of both social and philosophical interest. In a pioneer essay of 1898, Anesaki Masaharu, who had studied under Deussen, “urges the study of Nietzsche as a way of strengthening the philosophical foundations of Japanese Buddhism and of defending against encroachments by Christian ideas” (p. 181). Images of Nietzsche were the center of literary controversies early in this century, and he was read by Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. But it is Watsuji Tetsurō who placed him on the agenda of philosophers, in his *Niche kenkyū* (1913); he went on to seek “Dionysian” elements in traditional Japanese culture (pp. 192–93). In remarkable contrast to their European counterparts, there was an “utter indifference toward Nietzsche on the part of the Japanese fascists” (p. 195). Central to the postwar Nietzsche renaissance was NISHITANI Keiji’s *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (1949; Eng. trans. 1990), centered on an account of Nietzsche that has both scholarly and existential merit.

We are still unable to judge Nietzsche, for we are still in the quandary he so powerfully named. To present him as a crypto-Buddhist is to miss the force of his questioning, which enacts a volcanic crisis of the West rather than any opening to the East. His transvaluations offer only a challenge to existential authenticity, not a doctrine of salvation; his gospel of eternal recurrence remains a dead letter. Buddhism and Christianity may let themselves be purged by Nietzsche; but that is not an adequate response. They must also draw on the resources of their tradition to heal the Nietzschean wound. Perhaps Christianity will find that it needs Asian wisdom in order to perform this therapy (which is also a self-therapy).

REFERENCES

DEUSSEN, Paul

1883 *Das System des Vedānta*. Leipzig: Brockhaus.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich

1980 *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. 8 vols. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.

NISHITANI Keiji

1990 *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*. Translated by Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

OLDENBERG, Hermann

1959 *Buddha: Sein Leben, Seine Lehre, Seine Gemeinde*. Edited by Helmuth von Glasenapp. Stuttgart: Cotta (reprint).

PARKES, Graham, ed.

1987 *Heidegger and Asian Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

WELBON, Guy Richard

1968 *The Buddhist Nirvāna and Its Western Interpreters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Joseph S. O'Leary
Sophia University, Tokyo