Paul J. GRIFFITHS, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood.* SUNY Series, Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religions 8, Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. xxii + 261 pp. ISBN 0-7914-2127-9 (cloth); ISBN 0-7914-2128-7 (paper).

WHILE JOSÉ CABEZÓN'S BOOK in the same series (1994) deals with "scholasticism" as a comparative category, Griffiths deals with the almost equally unfashionable category of "doctrine." Both Cabezón and Griffiths are intensely concerned with the rationality of religious discourse and sharply critical of those who play down its importance. The importance of this theme and the quality of their writing have made their works key references for stu-

dents of Buddhism and religion.

The most interesting thing about doctrines is their claim to convey objective truths about the being of invisible, transcendent entities. This is also what interests Griffiths most. But here he focuses on formal properties of doctrine, "conceptual relations among ordered sets of statements" (p. 2), in a way that rather distracts from the claim of doctrine to comprise true judgment. He sees truth as one of the possible features that prompt a statement to be adopted as doctrine by a community, as a "property controlling acceptability" which is "indexed to a community's perception of its artifacts" (p. 6). This seems to me a highly stilted sociological distantiation, and it puts obstacles in the way of a lively appreciation of the power of doctrine in religious history.

Griffiths understands doctrine in a wider sense than creed or dogma; he includes moral imperatives and other statements of binding significance for a community. His formalism obliges him to push this broad definition to an absurd extreme: "One might imagine, for example, some religious community for which the only acceptability-creating property is neither truth nor rightness but salvific efficacy, or one for which it is *being seventeen syllables long*" (p. 9). Such imaginative free variation is supposed to bring into view the formal essence of doctrine. But is there such an essence? The various items Griffiths recognizes as doctrine have in common only scattered "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein). Despite his efforts to respect the empirical diversity of doctrinal formations, his assumption that they must share some universal definition causes him to run the risk of essentialism. However, since Christianity and Buddhism are the only two traditions that Griffiths is really concerned with, the illegitimate universalization of his typology does little damage to his main argument.

Secondary doctrines "state rules governing how the community's primary doctrines are to be ordered, derived, recognized, interpreted, and used" (p. 12). This is another formal universal, applicable to all religious communities. But this construction can be queried at its base, for the distinction between primary and secondary is a late, sophisticated development and does enable a clear retrospective differentiation between primary and secondary within a given doctrinal tradition. Are scriptural inspiration and papal infallibility primary or secondary doctrines? The answer is far from obvious, and whichever answer one chooses is loaded with one's own interpretative bias. Indeed, distinctions between primary and secondary are intensely problematic even in the pure sciences. I quote Helmholtz: "How much, in the axioms of geometry, has an objectively valid sense? How much on the contrary is merely definition, or consequence of definitions, or dependent on the form of presentation?" (RIEHL 1925, p. 5).

Again, the claim that "every religious community necessarily possesses especially authoritative texts" (p. 13) is dubious. If one can imagine a community that makes seventeen-syllable format a criterion of doctrine, one can much more easily imagine one without authoritative texts. What about the mass of nonliterate religious cultures? Griffiths would say that they have buildings, rituals, and oral, visual, and musical texts. But if one stretches the sense of the word "text" this far, the principle becomes perilously vague. And

even then, it could be that these "texts" turn out to be a plurality of scattered customs—one does such and such at a given festival, and something quite different at another, and there is no governing text that fits the various practices together. Frequentation of Shinto *matsuri* might even prompt one to imagine a possibility Griffiths excludes, that of a religion without doctrine.

"Primary doctrines have many uses for the communities whose doctrines they are. Prominent among these is the demarcation of the community" (p. 21). Prominent in the eyes of the detached sociological observer, perhaps, but would a religious believer think of a primary doctrine as being "useful"? Here the formalist approach proves phenomenologically distorting. But again this is only a surface trapping of the argument, for Griffiths goes on to state the greater importance of "strictly doctrinal uses of doctrine," chief among which are their "descriptive claims" (p. 22)—a phrase that does not quite catch the force of doctrine's claim to truth.

Here Griffiths is continuing his polemic against Lindbeck's view "that the only job doctrines can do is a regulative one" (p. 205; see LINDBECK 1984). But Lindbeck was talking about doctrine in the strict sense of dogmas, and did not deny that at the primary level the language of faith is full of descriptive statements (as noted in GRIFFITHS 1991, p. 41, and O'LEARY 1994, p. 114). In an unconvincing retrospective idealization, Lindbeck attributes to dogmas a methodological status comparable to that of Griffiths's "secondary doctrine." I am not sure that this is in contradiction with Griffiths's more general formal claims. The application of these to the intratheological question about the status of dogma may entail a foreshortening of the debate.

The bulk of Griffiths's book is a study of the doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha as developed in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, the *Abhidharmakośa*, and their commentaries. He sees this doctrine as governed by "an attempt to construct a notion of something maximally great" (p. 58), comparable to Anselm's construction of God as that than which no greater can be thought, or to the "Christological maximalism" that Lindbeck sees as a regulative principle of doctrine construction. I find this angle of approach rather unpromising, and am unconvinced by the suggestion that "the attempt to characterize, delineate, and, if possible, exhaustively define maximal greatness" (p. 59) is a "transcultural universal" in religious thinking (p. 60). The title Tathāgata, "thus-come," describes something that has changed its location or state "in a maximally significant way" (p. 61), the ascription of complete awakening to the Buddha "is one more example of the thrust toward maximality," and being awakened is "a great-making quality" (p. 62). Here the formal emphasis on maximality occludes the phenomenological sense of these attributes. Griffiths needs to question behind the superlatives heaped on the Buddha, just as Christian theologians question behind those heaped on Christ, in order to identify what is at issue phenomenologically.

Griffiths's exposition of the three-bodies doctrine is richly documented and profoundly illuminating; it should fully satisfy the curiosity of all who have been intrigued by the topic. He focuses particularly on the tensions inherent in the attempt to hold together the changeless, self-sufficient dharma

body with the more relational role of the transformation and enjoyment bodies. These are reminiscent of similar tensions in Christian theology between God's immutability and his action in creation, or between Christ's divine and human natures. The usefulness of the initial definitions, which aim to facilitate a comparative classification of the teachings of different religions and a critique of them in terms both of internal consistency and basic presuppositions (pp. 23–5), is not very apparent in these chapters, though Griffiths's formalist concern does generate a logical and epistemological alertness that adds to the cogency of his account. When he says that his model has allowed him "to treat buddhalogical doctrine as a system of ideas without relating it to the social and institutional setting" (p. 181), the boast is a thin one; most expositors do the same.

It is because Griffiths dwells so respectfully on the logic and ontology implicit in the doctrine that his critique, fully stated in the last chapter, possesses the force that it does. Its main target is the axiom that "whatever great-making properties there are, Buddha has them maximally." The suggestion that buddhalogy (as distinct from "buddhology") is "formally identical with Christian theology, since both enterprises are largely based upon and impelled by" the maximal-greatness intuition (p. 182), seems too sweeping, and is likely to stymie the clarification of that intuition from its origins in Buddhist religious experience. He claims that Christian thinkers are fixated on this intuition just as Buddhists are (p. 201). But perhaps in the case of the Christian doctrine of God it is not so much the intuition of God's infinite greatness that is amiss as its metaphysical formalization, which oversteps the bounds of what can meaningfully be said.

Griffiths checks the maximal-greatness intuition against the internal procedural rules of the Buddhist system and proposes that its massive doctrinal force would have been better invested in the dharma rather than in the Buddha; instead, "Buddha swallows up dharma" (p. 184). As a result the Buddha is projected as lacking vivid perceptual experience, the freedom to make decisions and judgments, and all emotions, beliefs, and memories. "It follows that it cannot seem like anything to Buddha to be Buddha" (p. 196). This is in tension with accounts of Buddha in its transformation bodies as a personal, joyful, compassionate being. The tension can be resolved only by a radical change in what count as great-making properties, a shift away from the metaphysical to the soteriological, and a resubordination of the Buddha-doctrine to the concrete, realistic temporal ordering of the Buddha-legend (p. 90).

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