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FEATURE REVIEWS

Nietzsche and Early Buddhism

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Nietzsche and Buddhism: Prolegomenon to a Comparative Study. By Freny Mistry. Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1981. Pp. 211.

Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities. By Robert G. Morrison. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. x + 250.

Western scholarship in the field of comparing Nietzsche and Buddhism got off to a shrill and not very promising start with the publication in 1933 of *Nietzsche und der Buddhismus* by Max Ladner.¹ (I say "Western" because essays on this topic began to appear in Japan in the 1890s, even before Nietzsche's death.²) An adulator of Wagner, Ladner admits from the start that he has no interest in attaining a comprehensive understanding of Nietzsche's thought, since it would be a joyless undertaking even to try. Nor does the author make any attempt to conceal his animosity toward the Nietzsche half of his subject, so that his utter contempt is evident on almost every page. His method—though that term may overly dignify the procedure—is to plod chronologically through almost every utterance Nietzsche made concerning Buddhism and show how hopelessly wrongheaded his understanding was. Since it is especially misleading in the case of Nietzsche's writings to take isolated remarks out of context, Ladner's conclusions are less than illuminating. And because the author at no point displays any appreciation for the nature of Nietzsche's philosophical project, this first book on Nietzsche and Buddhism is of use mainly for its references to the relevant textual passages.

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In 1981 Freny Mistry, a Nietzsche scholar from India who studied in Germany, published a book in English titled *Nietzsche and Buddhism* (the book under review here). She brought to the work a rare combination of qualifications: an excellent grasp of Nietzsche's thought and a comprehensive understanding of early (Theravāda) Buddhism. Although there is the occasional stylistic infelicity and missed diacritical mark, as well as some incoherence in the book's organization, it is a carefully and broadly researched study presented in clear and direct prose. It opens with the citation of an unpublished note that Nietzsche wrote in the early 1880s, in which he says: "I could be the Buddha of Europe: though admittedly an antipode to the Indian Buddha." Mistry announces her intention to show that the putative an-

tipodes are in fact surprisingly close, “despite marked differences in expression and perspective,” and that Nietzsche and the Buddha (as portrayed in the early Buddhist scriptures) “showed complementary ways to self-redemption” (pp. 1, 4).

In the introduction Mistry carefully documents the main sources from which Nietzsche drew his conception of Buddhism, and points up “the marked ambivalence” that characterizes Nietzsche’s explicit references to the Buddha and his doctrines. The main texts are (in the probable order of his encountering them): Carl Koeppen’s *Die Religion des Buddha* (Berlin, 1859), M. Coomaraswamy’s *Dialogues and Discourses of Gotama Buddha* (London, 1874), Max Müller’s *Essays II: Beiträge zur vergleichende Mythologie und Ethnologie* (Leipzig, 1869), Hermann Oldenberg’s *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (Berlin, 1881), and H. Kern’s *Der Buddhismus und seine Geschichte in Indien* (Leipzig, 1884). Throughout the course of her study the author speculates intelligently on the sources for Nietzsche’s understanding of particular Buddhist ideas, citing the relevant passages in English translation, and then evaluates the reliability of these secondary texts by comparing them with the corresponding Buddhist scriptures.

The first chapter, “The Overcoming of Metaphysics and Nihilism,” takes its orientation from Nietzsche’s frequent remarks on the parallels between the intellectual and spiritual revolutions that took place during the time of the Buddha and the changing situation in nineteenth-century Europe. Mistry draws parallels between the Vedānta philosophy prevalent in India and Schopenhauer’s thought (which was influenced by it), and then between the respective “overcomings of metaphysics” effected by Nietzsche and the Buddha. They both aim at overcoming nihilism, she suggests, through a reliance on human capacities rather than a faith in some salvific power beyond the natural world.

In “The Analysis of Personality and Universe,” she compares the Buddha’s breaking down of the “I,” or self, into the five “aggregates” with Nietzsche’s analysis of the “I,” or subject, into a multiplicity of drives, noting the emphasis from both sides on the living human body. Correspondingly, they both understand things and substances as merely conventional unities rather than entities “in themselves,” and as being posited by human beings in an attempt to avoid facing up to the basic fact of *impermanence*. Mistry then delineates the parallels between the Buddhist conception of elements of existence continually arising and perishing in “dependent co-origination” and Nietzsche’s conception of the world as a complex play of “will to power.” In both cases redemption is to be found in the here-and-now rather than in a world beyond, though in theory (early) “Buddhism advocates the overcoming of the will altogether” whereas Nietzsche aims at a continual self-overcoming of the energies that make up will to power (pp. 69–70).

The third chapter deals with “the experiment with truth and reason.” Rather than relying on any kind of revealed Truth emanating from God or the beyond, the Buddha and Nietzsche both advocate the employment of human powers of insight and wisdom (as opposed to merely theoretical reflection) toward the goal of attaining, in a “scientific” manner, various truths (in the plural) about the world. Mistry shows how Nietzsche misunderstood the Buddhist teaching on emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as passively

nihilistic, through being unaware of the Buddha's warnings against attachment to *śūnyatā* as a theory: "*Śūnyatā* seeks to 'empty' reality of thought-constructs and opinions, not of meaning altogether, as Nietzsche believes it to do" (p. 99). The chapter closes with an illuminating demonstration of the affinities between the Buddha's and Nietzsche's psychological strategies for effective teaching.

Chapter 4 is an insightful treatment of the problem of "suffering." Nietzsche reproached Buddhism as a form of "passive nihilism" on the grounds that its aim is the elimination of suffering and is thereby a denial of life. Mistry argues convincingly that much of Nietzsche's antipathy toward Buddhism on this topic stemmed from his associating it with Schopenhauer and Wagner, whose ideas he had come to repudiate. She shows that Nietzsche misunderstood what Buddhism is saying about suffering because of "a lack of adequate information available to him on what the term *dukkha* implies in Buddhism" (p. 120), a term which—because it also connotes joy and even bliss—is inadequately rendered as "suffering." The Buddha's focus is on eliminating such "causes" of *dukkha* as "selfish craving and lack of self-control, hatred, enmity, dejection, sloth, inertia, lust, anxiety, doubt, and . . . the presumption of a metaphysical-individual ego-substance" (p. 122). Nietzsche similarly mistook the Buddhist project of eradicating *taṇhā* (craving) as being life-denying, and Mistry points out that *taṇhā* is not desire per se, but "ego-ridden craving" founded on ignorance and consisting of "the desire for immortality or for annihilation, for metaphysical beliefs and soul theories" (p. 131). By showing that "non-attachment" is important in Nietzsche, and that the Buddhists advocate active endeavor and compassion in the sense of "creative friendship" as means of self-overcoming, she reveals significant harmonies between the two apparently disparate projects.

Nietzsche writes that he arrived at his idea of eternal recurrence, which he regarded as the most life-affirming idea possible, through a confrontation with the "opposite ideal," a "world-renouncing" mode of thought that he thought was advocated by the Buddha and Schopenhauer. Mistry's fifth chapter shows that Nietzsche again misunderstood Buddhism on this point, and that the thought of eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche called a "European form of Buddhism," is actually opposed to the Indian form in only minor respects. She cites Nietzsche's unpublished notes—from when he was working to finish *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and to achieve a satisfactory formulation of the thought of recurrence—that show he was reading passages in Oldenberg's *Buddha* dealing with Buddhist ideas of recurrence. It seems very likely that some of the imagery he found in Oldenberg found its way into his thinking about eternal recurrence. Mistry tends in this chapter to take both the Nietzschean and Buddhist ideas too literally for my taste: eternal recurrence as a statement about the way the world really is rather than an existential imperative, and death and rebirth as occurring between successive reincarnations rather than at every moment within this life. Nevertheless her conclusion that both sides are aiming at "perfect" activity in this present existence is well drawn.

In the book's final chapter, "The Transfiguration of Suffering and Nirvana," she consolidates her argument that, in spite of Nietzsche's understanding (and consequent rejection) of *nirvāṇa* as a nihilistic condition, his existential project is, ironi-

cally, remarkably close to the Buddha's. She demonstrates that Walter Kaufmann's characterization of the ideal of nirvāṇa as "the very antithesis of Nietzsche's apotheosis of creativity" is wrongheaded, being based on an unquestioning acceptance of Nietzsche's (mis)conception of the goal of Buddhist practice (pp. 186–188). In spite of a few divergences, which Mistry is careful to delineate, she concludes that both Nietzsche and Buddhism in some sense aim at "redemption in this world through the creative transformation of suffering."

As mentioned above, I think that *Nietzsche and Buddhism* could have been more coherently organized. My only other reservation concerns two methodological features. The author tends to cite passages from the entirety of Nietzsche's writings indiscriminately, treating notes from the *Nachlass* on a par with passages from the published works. She also quotes a great deal from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but without distinguishing what is said through the persona of Zarathustra from Nietzsche's voices as quoted from his other, nonnarrative works. The combination makes for a reading of Nietzsche that is less subtle than it might have been. But all in all this is a definitive and comprehensive treatment of an important, and generally neglected, aspect of Nietzsche's thought. Mistry's contention that the affinities between the Buddhist and Nietzschean paths to self-overcoming are surprisingly numerous and by no means merely superficial is convincingly argued, and her book therefore constitutes—as its subtitle suggests it is intended to—a powerful stimulus for further comparative studies.

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The first thing that struck me on seeing Robert G. Morrison's *Nietzsche and Buddhism*, which is a shorter book than Mistry's (the pages being much smaller), was the strangeness of his choosing the same title. Why not *Nietzsche and Early Buddhism* for instance? Nor does the "ironic affinities" of his subtitle distinguish it much, if it means that some salient features of Nietzsche's thinking have significant counterparts in the Buddhism that he for the most part rejected—since this is, as we have seen, precisely Mistry's argument. So it is only natural to raise the question: what does the new *Nietzsche and Buddhism* offer that the old one didn't? In order to be in a position to answer this question, I reread Mistry's book in its entirety before reading Morrison's.

In view of Mistry's subtitle, *Prolegomenon to a Comparative Study*, one might expect the later book to begin where the earlier left off, perhaps by undertaking a comparison with Mahāyāna Buddhism rather than the Theravāda tradition. But such an expectation is unfulfilled, since Morrison's study turns out to cover pretty much the same ground as Mistry's, with only a very few references to the Mahāyāna. Time and again the same passages and sources are cited and explicated, which is natural if one is making the same comparison—but redundant unless one is drawing different conclusions. Is it possible that Morrison didn't know of Mistry's book? No: it appears in his bibliography, although, as one of the shortest entries among thirteen pages of secondary sources, it is easy to overlook. So the *raison d'être* for the new *Nietzsche*

and *Buddhism* must be that Mistry's position is discussed and criticized, or her major theses qualified or refuted. No: all one finds is five rather cursory footnotes (from a total of over seven hundred) referring to the earlier book, with no engagement with any of its arguments.

Can it be, then, that the author is an amateur scholar, innocent of the rules of the game? No: the jacket blurb informs us that he is a lecturer in Buddhist studies, and he explains in his preface that he wrote "a Ph.D. thesis on *Nietzsche and Buddhism*." But if his advisor(s) explained to him how to deal with previously published scholarship on one's topic, the candidate appears to have ignored that advice. Surely, if someone has already done the research, presented the material, and made the arguments, you say so in your dissertation—and then take it from there and do something new, or different, with that material. Or, if the earlier work is unsatisfactory, you say so and explain why. What you don't do is just say the same things over again in your own words, as if they hadn't already been said—even if you then go on, as Morrison does, to develop a few ideas of your own.

For anyone familiar with Mistry's study, the large amount of repetition in Morrison's book makes reading it a very frustrating experience—and a distressing confirmation of the Buddha's first Noble Truth. I was tempted to forgo reviewing it altogether, on the Nietzschean grounds that it is better simply to "pass by" rather than expend time and energy saying negative things. But Nietzsche also emphasizes responsibility, and we seem to be forgetting these days that to publish a book makes one responsible for a considerable expenditure of other people's time and money (not to mention natural resources). I should mention, too, that Freny Mistry met a tragically early death in a traffic accident several years ago, so that I feel called upon in some sense to speak up on her behalf.

Two further considerations weighed against opting out. The first is that the topic is one of the most interesting in comparative philosophy, and deserves more discussion than it has received so far. The more important reason has to do with the prestige of the publisher, which tends to confer credibility upon the book's contents. It's a sad thing to have to criticize an institution one has long admired—enough to make one long for the old days, when the sight of one of Oxford's books standing in the library shelves, quietly resplendent in its gold lettering and noble crest on a background of deep navy blue, provided assurance that it contained scholarship of the highest standard, usually couched in prose as elegant as it was erudite. But the new *Nietzsche and Buddhism* falls into a different class altogether, reading more like a run-of-the-mill doctoral dissertation than a work of real scholarship. The text suffers from gratuitous repetitiveness, factual errors, misprints, and a style that is awkward to the point of syntactical blunders. Its publication in such an ill-fashioned state may actually be a disservice to the field of comparative philosophy.

The book's opening sentence, which it is prudent to make special efforts to get right, hardly inspires confidence. "On an autumn day in Leipzig in the year 1864, the young Nietzsche—'a directionless and despairing 21-year-old'—was browsing in a second-hand bookshop owned by his landlord..." (p. 3). Most people who know anything about Nietzsche's life know that he was born in 1844, so that,

depending on whether this autumn day was before or after October 15, he would have been a despairing nineteen- or twenty-year-old at the time. And in the autumn of 1864 he was beginning his university studies at Bonn, not moving to Leipzig until October of 1865. Minor points, perhaps, but, appearing as they do in the first sentence of the book, they become emblematic of the work as a whole. Morrison keeps getting Nietzsche's age wrong (p. 64), even when the sources he cites have it right. He then has Nietzsche being "forced into an early retirement at the age of 31 by his recurring illnesses" (p. 108), when in fact he persevered with his professorship until he was almost 35. Further down the page the author remarks that many of Nietzsche's symptoms may have been "no more than the effects of congenital syphilis." Although Nietzsche's eventual breakdown very probably was a consequence of syphilis, there is no evidence whatsoever that it was congenital. Again these points are not central to Morrison's primary concerns; but in view of the amount of responsible literature on Nietzsche, it is superfluous to make them without taking care to get them right.

The misprints dismay especially since they, too, start early. A few examples: "EC" for "EH" (p. 4), "afterall" (p. 5), "übungeninnerer" for "Übungen innerer" (p. 27), "I will not deal directly with the Fourth Noble Truths here" (p. 31), and "Begier" for "Begierde" (p. 66). Italics are sometimes withheld from book titles in the footnotes, and then, as if in compensation, they take over entire lines of text (pp. 157 and 159).

The repetitiveness also sets in early. In his second chapter, speaking for Nietzsche, Morrison writes:

Buddhism no longer speaks of "the struggle against *sin*," but, quite in accordance with actuality, the "struggle against *suffering*" which is simply a physiological fact. It therefore has "the ... self-deception of moral concepts behind it..." (p. 25)

Four pages later, he cites the well-known passage in *The Antichrist*, which says that Buddhism, unlike Christianity,

no longer speaks of "the struggle against *sin*," but, quite in accordance with actuality, the "struggle against *suffering*." It already has ... the self-deception of moral concepts behind it. (p. 29)

And then, just two pages after that, he reminds us yet again that Nietzsche says that Buddhism

no longer speaks of "the struggle against *sin*," but, quite in accordance with actuality, the "struggle against *suffering*." (p. 31)

—and appends, for the third time in six pages, a footnote referring the reader to aphorism 20 of *The Antichrist*. In the context, these repetitions accomplish nothing save to insult the reader's intelligence and arouse grim expectations of what is to come. Even more astonishing than the author's obliviousness to such redundancies is the fact that no editor saw fit to recommend excisions.

Plodding prose is especially hard to put up with when the topic is as consummate a stylist as Nietzsche, but in Morrison's case it often comes down to syntactic

and semantic incoherence. Dangling participles abound, verbs fail to agree in number with their subjects, and relative pronouns hover confusingly over ranges of possible antecedents. The following two sentences give an idea of the problems:

It is by working on and with the affects that comprises [Nietzsche's] notion of self-overcoming, that constitutes the accumulative process of qualitatively higher expressions of the will to power, a process that he considers will eventually bring forth his new kind of being, the *Übermensch*. Therefore, although we may know little of the workings of our unconscious "under-wills," the fact that he considers that whatever goes on in the body terminates as our affects, and that such affects are symptoms of the sickness or health of the body, the fact that self-overcoming is a matter of our working with the affects means that knowledge of the unknown workings of the body is not of immediate or prime importance. (p. 109)

Even if one can reconstruct from this something that makes sense, it still doesn't constitute a coherent interpretation of what Nietzsche is saying.

III

The first, shorter part of Morrison's book is titled "Nietzsche's Buddhism" and is an account of how Nietzsche misunderstood Buddhism and the sources of that misunderstanding. The second part, "Ironical Affinities," delineates the parallels between Nietzsche's and Theravāda Buddhist ideas, his misunderstanding of them notwithstanding.

A question that is basic to any comparison of this kind concerns the sources of Nietzsche's conception of Buddhism, but for some reason Morrison delays discussion of these until the end of his part 1, where he has nothing to add to what is given in Mistry's account. He follows her in saying that Koeppen's book is the first work on Buddhism that Nietzsche read, in 1870, and suggests this as a source "for Nietzsche's view that nirvana is the 'desire for nothingness' and implies total annihilation of the individual at death" (p. 53).

Morrison apparently reads Pāli, but was clearly hampered in his research for this book by a lack of German. An examination of Nietzsche's juvenilia (published in the 1930s and available in a current reprint) shows that he was wondering about the Sanskrit words *aham* (I) and *ahamkara* (I-ness) as early as 1861, when he presumably came across them in one of his classes at school.³ Had Morrison consulted the work (published after Mistry's book) of scholars like Johann Figl, he would have learned that Nietzsche's acquaintance with Indian thought dates back to his schooldays at Schulpforta (1858–1864), and that he was introduced to Buddhism by a lecture course he attended during his second semester as a student at Bonn (1865).⁴ In fact, if Morrison had looked at an obviously relevant work, *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, he would have found an English translation of an essay of Figl's which cites the following passage from Nietzsche's lecture notes from 1865:

In Buddhism there is an even deeper submersion into pantheistic nihilism. Nirvana is the goal[:] "annihilation."⁵

This is surely a more significant source for Nietzsche's understanding of nirvāṇa as "desire for nothingness." A couple of years later, however, he is using the term "nirvana" in a positive sense, to refer to blissful states occasioned by listening to music (by Liszt) and contemplating the beauties of nature (rivers and valleys near Leipzig and Bonn).⁶

Morrison's surmise that Nietzsche's views could have been influenced by "the Sanskrit and Pali scholars he talked to at the university of Basle" (p. 55) sounds as if it concerns potentially interesting new material—at least until one realizes that there were no Sanskrit or Pāli scholars there in Nietzsche's day.

The new *Nietzsche and Buddhism* begins with a discussion of "the historical parallel between India at the time of the Buddha and the Europe of [Nietzsche's] own milieu" (p. 8), which was treated, as we saw, by Mistry in her first chapter. Morrison then proceeds to an account of Nietzsche's criticisms of Buddhism for being nihilistic in a negative sense, for promoting "passive" rather than "active nihilism"—another topic discussed at length by Mistry (introduction and chapters 1, 4, and 6). Although he provides a more detailed analysis of the notion of *dukkha*, Morrison has nothing to add to her conclusion that "Nietzsche's interpretation of the Buddhist view of suffering is essentially a misconstruction" (Mistry, p. 116), even though an understandable one in view of the state of scholarship at the time.

The second part of the book begins with a chapter titled "Nietzsche's View of Man." One could perhaps appreciate as quaint the use of the term "man" throughout the text, if feminist criticism hadn't made it important to understand that Nietzsche is almost always writing about *der Mensch*, human beings, and by no means excluding "woman." Much of the chapter consists of a labored, and not very relevant, account of Darwin and Nietzsche's response to him. But there is no sense whatsoever of the evolution of Nietzsche's thinking—quotes from early works are juxtaposed indiscriminately with citations from late works—nor of the specific differences between texts that Nietzsche spent enormous energy on seeing into publication and notes which he chose not to publish (as in much of the non-Nietzsche book *The Will to Power*).

Chapter 7 is remarkable for its structure: it is divided into two more or less equal sections, the second of which is marked "7.1." It seems that word-processing tools are beginning to prevail over human editors. The conclusion from these first two chapters is that there are affinities between Nietzsche's idea of the human being as a particular pattern of will to power within the larger relational matrix of the natural world and the Buddhist understanding of the human being—and of the human body especially, as conditioned by *paṭicca-samuppāda* ("dependent co-arising"). A valid conclusion—but again one that is already argued for in considerable detail by Mistry (in her second chapter).

Chapter 8 bears the first promising title of Morrison's book: "Nietzsche's 'Little Things,' the 'Body,' and the Buddhist *Khandas*"—though why the "body" should be in quote marks is unclear. By drawing our attention to what Nietzsche has to say about "the little things" such as "the food we eat, our metabolism, where we live, our climatic environment" (p. 102), the author is surely on the right track for affin-

ities with Buddhism. Indeed Nietzsche's enthusiasm over "the small, inconspicuous truths" dates farther back than the late work from which Morrison quotes, to the time of *Human, All Too Human*. But then he spoils it by trivializing the concern with the little things as "just Nietzsche grumbling" and as "no more than aids to self-overcoming," and then negating them completely by saying: "much, if not all, can be achieved without them" (pp. 108–109). The "if not all" totally nullifies the insistence of both Nietzsche and the Buddhists on the benefits of full awareness of the specific, here-and-now details of our actual lives.

In a section on the "body" and the "aggregates" Morrison begins with Nietzsche's idea of "subject multiplicity" and the human body as a corresponding multiplicity of "under-wills." This is again on the right track for an illuminating comparison with the Buddhist idea of the *khandas* (better known in Sanskrit as *skandhas*). But the incoherence of the prose—as exemplified in the passage on page 109 that was quoted above—soon gives way to a misunderstanding of Nietzsche's conception of the drives, or affects, which is of central importance here. With reference to aphorism 119 of *Dawn of Morning*, Morrison writes:

Man is, therefore, nothing other than "the totality of [his] drives," which ebb and flow in a continual flux of becoming, formed, to a greater or lesser degree, by the stimulus afforded by the environment. (p. 110)

Nietzsche does, indeed, understand the individual as a configuration of drives (*Triebe*), but in doing so he points up the predominance of *inner* forces over external in the constitution of the individual. The drives are by no means "formed . . . by the stimulus afforded by the environment"; rather, they constitute that environment by interpreting what Nietzsche calls "nerve stimuli." What is significant about the drives is that even though each individual configuration of them is unique, the drives themselves are *transpersonal*, and animate the living body with energies that flow from archaic sources.⁷

Morrison does acknowledge the role of the "evolutionary past" for Nietzsche, but he goes wrong in saying that "to truly affirm life" consists of the higher type's "adding distance between himself and his animal past." Of course Nietzsche regards someone who is dominated by animal drives as no better than a beast; but in living affirmatively the point is to engage one's "animal past" in the right way—by *training* the animal drives *without taming* them.⁸ If Morrison had a better understanding of Nietzsche's ideas on the archaic character of the drives, he could have developed his remarks on the Buddhist notion of "past karmic action" into an interesting theme. As it is, Mistry's "analysis of personality and universe" in terms of the multiplicity of the body and the Buddhist "aggregates" remains the more informative treatment of these rich topics.

The next chapter, "'God's Shadow' and the Buddhist 'No-Self' Doctrine," pretty much recapitulates Mistry's discussion (in her first three chapters) of the denial of God, substance, a metaphysical realm, and the self in Buddhism and Nietzsche. At the beginning of his tenth chapter, "'The Will to Power' and 'Thirst'," Morrison writes:

As Nietzsche's notion of will to power has its paradigm in Hesiod's notion of *Eris* or Strife, I will use the notion of *Erôs* as found in Plato's *Symposium* as a paradigm for *taṇhā* ["thirst"]. (p. 133)

(The reader may be excused some puzzlement over the author's methodology at this point.) There are indeed affinities between will to power and Platonic and cosmogonic *erôs*, even though the ideas concerning "force-center" physics that Nietzsche learned from Boscovich and Lange were more important for the development of his understanding of "the world will to power" (as Morrison documents in an earlier chapter). The discussion of *taṇhā* is much more extensive than in Mistry's book, but the roundabout comparisons of "paradigms" are strained and ultimately not very illuminating.

IV

Finally, in his last two chapters, Morrison begins to hit his stride as far as marking the "ironic affinities" is concerned. Chapter 11 compares the process of self-overcoming in Nietzsche with the Buddhist practice of *citta-bhāvanā*, which he translates as "mind-development." This is potentially an enlightening comparison, and the discussion of the Buddhist ideas is informative, but the author's poor understanding of what Nietzsche is saying prevents him from doing anything very interesting with it.

The main problem here derives from Morrison's condescending attitude toward his subject. Nietzsche's theme of self-overcoming is "not sufficiently worked out" (p. 158); he is portrayed as "trying to achieve" something in the area of communicating ideas, but as failing (p. 160); his idea of sublimation is "a little simplistic" (p. 162); there are "no clear answers in Nietzsche's writing" to the questions the author poses for him (p. 163); and, moreover, "what little advice Nietzsche has given above raises more questions than it answers" (p. 167). It apparently never occurs to Dr. Morrison that the shortcoming may not lie with Herr Nietzsche but rather with himself as an insufficiently careful reader of his works.

At least Morrison sees that the first step on the way to self-overcoming is the attainment of self-mastery. He cites the passage in *Twilight of the Idols* where Nietzsche says that the first phase is a "preschooling in spirituality [*Geistigkeit*]" which consists of "gaining control over the restraining instincts."⁹ Having decided that Nietzsche is incapable of elaborating his ideas adequately, Morrison proposes to do it for him with "an attempted model": "To picture what Nietzsche is trying to express from the various glimpses of his often uncompleted thoughts, a Hegelian-like dialectical model may help" (p. 168). I think not. What does help is to read with care and attention what Nietzsche actually wrote. If, instead of devoting his energies to complaining about uncompleted thoughts, Morrison had bothered to look for an account of the next stage in self-overcoming by reading the next section of *Twilight of the Idols*, he would have found what he was looking for. There Nietzsche writes that one "loses spirit"—and *Geist* is for him "the great self-mastery"—"when one no longer needs it" (*Twilight of the Idols*, 9.14). And since Morrison is confident that

Nietzsche “has left no guiding examples of his method” (p. 159), he fails to see that the consummate exemplification of one who goes beyond “great self-mastery” to successful self-overcoming is given a few pages further on, in the person of *Goethe*.

Nietzsche leads up to this guiding example by emphasizing something that is significantly consistent with Buddhist practice: that the true locus of culture is not the soul or spirit, but the body (*Leib*). He then says that “progress” in his sense is “a coming back up to a lofty, free, and terrible nature and naturalness.” The exemplar is Goethe, who managed to “come back up to the naturalness of the Renaissance” (*Twilight of the Idols*, 9.47, 48, 49):

What Goethe wanted was totality ... he disciplined himself into wholeness, he *created* himself. ... He conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being, adept in a range of physical skills [*Leiblichkeiten*], self-controlled and with reverence for himself, who can dare to grant himself the full range and richness of naturalness, and who is strong enough for this freedom.

The final stage of self-overcoming, then, consists of daring, after prolonged practice of self-mastery, to relax the discipline and trust to natural spontaneity. Morrison does mention later on “a movement from consciousness to instinct” in Nietzsche (p. 214), but he doesn’t elaborate or make clear that this is instinct *refined* through protracted discipline. (This pattern of extended practice succeeded by natural spontaneity is typical of many of the arts, martial as well as fine, that were developed in Japan under the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism.)

The eventual relaxation takes daring because the ego, which would otherwise control the process, has been overcome—dissolved into a plurality of drives—in the course of the protracted self-discipline. What is responsible for the disciplining are various (groups of) drives, and there comes a point where the discipline is no longer necessary because these various groups have learned to live in harmony with each other. Morrison fails to see the inconsistency of his supposing that it is the “I” that is doing the self-overcoming, since he never asks the (very Buddhist) question Nietzsche so often poses: *Who, or which drive, or what group of affects* is the agent of willing, disciplining, or whatever, in this particular situation?¹⁰ More generally, he detracts from the richness of Nietzsche’s account of self-overcoming by discussing only one of the metaphorical levels, that of cultivation, through which it is presented—ignoring the several parallel discourses that draw imagery from the natural elements, artistic workings of these, animal breeding and training, libidinal economics, internal politics of the psyche, and so forth.¹¹ These discursive fields would surely provide fruitful grounds for further comparisons with Buddhism.

The title of Morrison’s final chapter is meant to set up a contrast between Nietzsche’s undertaking of “learning to see” and the Buddhist aim of “seeing and knowing things as they really are.” The author spends a lot of time worrying about a contradiction he posits between Nietzsche’s well-known deprecation of consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) and the necessary role he (Morrison) thinks it would have to play in the process of self-overcoming (pp. 204, 206). By overlooking the obvious point that what is conscious (in the sense of *bewusst*) for Nietzsche is always conditioned

by *language*, Morrison misses another close affinity between the Nietzschean and Buddhist projects. It is precisely Nietzsche's insistence on the deep wisdom of the body, and on the fact that almost all of our "drive-life" goes on beneath the level of consciousness, that brings him close to the Buddhists' insistence on the somatic aspects of mindfulness and their efforts to circumvent or undercut conceptual thinking—which takes place consciously, in language.

Morrison rightly emphasizes Nietzsche's conception of objectivity as a matter of bringing as many perspectives to bear on the situation as possible. But if he had reflected upon Nietzsche's characterization of "learning to see" as "learning to comprehend and deal with *each individual case* from all sides," he would have realized that there is in fact something in Nietzsche that corresponds to the Buddhist aim of "seeing and knowing things as they really are."¹² It is accessible by following the important thrust in Nietzsche's thinking away from the anthropocentric standpoint: "As a researcher into nature," he writes in *The Joyous Science* (aphorism 349), "one should come out of one's human corner."

One way to get out of one's human corner is to "die" to the normal perspectives in which we look at the world, undergoing a "death with waking eyes"—but with eyes open to the "net of light" in which all things are spun as if buried in it. In a later, corresponding account, Zarathustra sees things as they are: "baptized in the well of eternity." Nietzsche also characterizes the necessary kind of dying as a "festival" in which we cross over to the dead world of the inorganic, realizing our fundamental identity with rock and stone. Another way to get beneath the level of consciousness is to "realize egoism as an error," and "Feel cosmically!"¹³ There is a mystical evocation of the condition of having come out of one's human corner in the chapter "Before Sunrise" in *Zarathustra* (3.4), where the protagonist, after an all-night vigil, greets the heavens before the sun rises over the sea and while the light illumines all things evenly, without bias or slant. Under these conditions, Zarathustra is surely able to "see and know things as they are": free from "their bondage under purpose" and enjoying what Nietzsche elsewhere calls "the innocence of becoming."¹⁴

Mistry's work, as an illuminating prolegomenon to a comparative study of Nietzsche and Buddhism, accomplishes a thorough preparation of the ground. In the last quarter of his book Morrison begins to cultivate some of that ground and extends it to a couple of new *topoi*, but his work is insufficiently thorough. Had he condensed the first three quarters of the book into a preliminary chapter recapitulating Mistry's accomplishments, and then devoted his energies to a thorough elaboration of the themes he introduces in his final two chapters, he could perhaps have come up with a study that furthers our understanding of the field. As it is, readers interested in the current state of scholarship won't miss anything by ignoring the first ten chapters of Morrison's book, reading Mistry's study first, and then turning to the final two chapters of the new *Nietzsche and Buddhism*.

Both books would in fact be more accurately titled *Nietzsche and Early Buddhism*. When one goes beyond the question of influence to comparative studies per se, later Buddhism provides in my view even more fertile ground. The extension of

the comparison to Mahāyāna schools of Buddhist philosophy, which has already been well begun by Japanese scholars, promises even greater increases in our understanding of Nietzsche, Buddhism, and—more important—ourselves and the world.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 – Max Ladner, *Nietzsche und der Buddhismus: Kritische Betrachtungen eines Buddhisten* (Zürich: Juchli-Beck, 1933).
- 2 – For more details, see my essay, “The Early Reception of Nietzsche’s Philosophy in Japan,” in Graham Parkes, ed., *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 177–199.
- 3 – See H. J. Mette, ed., *Friedrich Nietzsche Jugendschriften* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), vol. 1 (1854–1861), p. 245.
- 4 – Johann Figl, “Nietzsche’s frühe Begegnung mit dem Denken Indiens,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 18 (1989): 455–471, and “Die Buddhismus-Kenntnis des jungen Nietzsche,” in Elisabeth Gössmann and Günter Zobel, eds., *Das Gold im Wachs: Festschrift für Thomas Immoos zum 70. Geburtstag* (Munich: Iudicium, 1988), pp. 499–511.
- 5 – Johann Figl, “Nietzsche’s Early Encounters with Asian Thought,” in Parkes, *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, pp. 51–63, 59.
- 6 – See letters to von Gersdorff of 24 November and 1 December 1867, and to Rohde of 3 November 1867 and 3 February 1868; also cited in Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism*, p. 182.
- 7 – For a discussion of this generally neglected theme in Nietzsche, see the sections “Drives Archaically Imagining” and “Dreams and Archaic Inheritance” in chaps. 8 and 9, respectively, of Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 8 – See “Accommodating Animals” in chap. 6 of Parkes, *Composing the Soul*.
- 9 – Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 8.6.
- 10 – For a detailed exposition of this point, see chap. 9 of Parkes, *Composing the Soul*.
- 11 – These various levels are diagrammed on p. 120 of Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, and discussed in chaps. 4, 6, and 9.
- 12 – Morrison, p. 201, with reference to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 3.12, and *Twilight of the Idols*, 8.6 (italics added).
- 13 – Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, aphorism 308, and “At Noon,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 4.10. For a detailed account of going over to the dead

- world, see section 7 of Graham Parkes, "Staying Loyal to the Earth: Nietzsche as an Ecological Thinker," in John Lippitt, ed., *Nietzsche's Futures* (Harmondsworth: Macmillan, 1998): 167–188. See also "Feel cosmically!" (unpublished note from 1881), in *Kritische Studienausgabe* 9:11 [7].
- 14 – For a discussion of this theme, see section 5 of Graham Parkes, "Floods of Life around Granite of Fate: Emerson and Nietzsche as Thinkers of Nature," in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 43 (1997): 207–240.
- 15 – Some of the contributions from Japanese sources are discussed in my essays "The Early Reception of Nietzsche's Philosophy in Japan" in Parkes, *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, pp. 177–199, and "Nietzsche and East Asian Thought: Influences, Impacts, and Resonances" in Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge [England] and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 356–383. Watsuji Tetsurō's path-breaking study of Nietzsche from 1913 has not been translated into English, but some of Nishitani Keiji's discussions of Nietzsche can be found in Nishitani's *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), and *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. with an introd. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). See also the essays by the Japanese contributors to *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, Arifuku Kōgaku, Okōchi Ryōgi, and Sonoda Muneto.

Response to Graham Parkes' Review

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If one is to treat the work of another with such disdain as Professor Parkes displays, then one needs to be very sure of one's own ground. But, upon examination, this particular patch of high ground is not as secure as may at first appear. Unfortunately, in making this clear, I have little choice but to address shortcomings in the late Freny Mistry's work that I had preferred in my book to pass over.

Parkes claims that Mistry brings to her work, "a comprehensive understanding of early (Theravāda) Buddhism." Leaving aside the naïveté of equating Theravāda Buddhism with early Buddhism, it has to be said that Mistry's understanding of Theravāda Buddhism leaves much to be desired. I will cite a few examples.

On page 160 she makes one of the most egregious errors I have found in modern Buddhist literature. She says:

[I]f ethical action is performed with a view to reward, i.e. the desire to put an end to suffering or escape it altogether, the Buddha's ruthless injunction is: "There are eighty-four hundred thousand great periods, wherein both fools and wise, when they have run, have fared on, will make an end of suffering. Herein it is useless for one to say: 'By this