Religious Studies (2024), **60**, 187–191

BOOK REVIEWS

Tyler Dalton McNabb and Erick Baldwin *Classical Theism and Buddhism: Connecting Metaphysical and Ethical Systems*

(London: Bloomsbury, 2022). Pp. x + 161. £85.00 (Hbk). ISBN: 9781350189133.

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(Received 18 November 2022; revised 21 November 2022; accepted 28 November 2022; first published online 30 March 2023)

Classical Theism and Buddhism: Connecting Metaphysical and Ethical Systems challenges the common assumption that the Buddhist theses of interdependence and emptiness are in fundamental conflict with classical theism. Tyler Dalton McNabb and Erick Baldwin put forth a fresh and well-defended argument that the core tenets of mere Buddhism and classical theism are mutually compatible. By 'mere Buddhism', they mean the doctrines accepted by most Buddhists. After defending the metaphysical compatibility, McNabb and Baldwin further argue that the two religious traditions can be synthesized in the domains of ethics, soteriology, and religious experience. Thus, the volume concludes that it is possible for someone to be a Buddhist Christian or a Christian Buddhist.

The volume consists of seven chapters. The introduction reviews different approaches to the nature, possibility, and benefit of double religious belonging. This naturally leads to chapter 1, which addresses the most crucial question: whether the fundamental metaphysical doctrines of Buddhism and the essential doctrines of classical theism are compatible. McNabb and Baldwin first define and introduce the fundamental metaphysical doctrines of Buddhism (impermanence, interdependence, and emptiness) and of classical theism (immutability, impassibility, and simplicity). Then, appealing to the interpretations of Garfield, Westerhoff, and Burton, the chapter points out that the Buddhist theses of interdependence and impermanence apply only to objects, things, or phenomena. Since God is not a thing among other things, McNabb and Baldwin argue that the Buddhist thesis of interdependence does not apply to God. Building on this argument, the chapter concludes that mere Buddhism and classical theism are not in fundamental conflict, and one can affirm the core doctrines of both traditions in a coherent or holistic manner.

The chapter then responds to some potential objections. According to Masao Abe's interpretation of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, the Buddhist middle way is absolute nothingness, which liberates one from every illusory point of view connected with either affirmation or negation, being or non-being. Responding to the challenge of Abe's interpretation of emptiness, which conflicts with Garfield's understanding, the chapter provides convincing evidence and reasons for preferring Garfield's more metaphysically modest

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412523000276 Published online by Cambridge University Press

view. In addition, the chapter also gives five reasons why the Buddhist thesis of interdependence is not in contradiction with the Christian doctrine of creation ex *nihilo*.

Chapter 2 engages three long-standing critiques of theism from Buddhist perspectives and argues that they fail to undermine the central argument of this volume. The chapter points out that these objections often assume a univocal understanding of God and fail to consider the God of classical theism. The first objection is represented by Steinkellner's rejection of the possibility of interaction between a permanent factor and impermanent entities. Drawing on Stump's analogy of the relation between the three-dimensional world and a two-dimensional world, McNabb and Baldwin argue that God is fully present all at once and genuinely communicates with his creation. The second objection, articulated by Burton, is that causes must resemble their effects, and so therefore the God of classical theism would have to share properties with the created world. In response to this resemble assumption (RA), McNabb and Baldwin point out that RA is plausible only in the loose sense, and the world doesn't need to resemble God completely. Responding next to the problem of evil, the chapter argues that due to the epistemic gap between man and God, we are not in the position to know what God would and wouldn't do when it comes to most instances of evil. This chapter engages with the objections to sceptical theism in contemporary literature and argues that sceptical theism is a perfectly natural response to the problem of evil.

Chapter 3 tackles five objections to classical theism in contemporary analytic literature. The first three objections concern how an immutable and impassible God could possess temporal knowledge, experiential knowledge, and be capable of love. Thinking from the perspective of a B-theory of time, McNabb and Baldwin argue that all of time exists, and, analogically speaking, God knows the past, present, and future all at the same time. The idea is that God impassively knows His creatures' experiences and feelings in the same way that God impassively knows his own mind. McNabb and Baldwin argue that their account preserves divine immutability while being compatible with divine omniscience. Responding next to the problem of determinism, McNabb and Baldwin argue that the divine universal causality is consistent with libertarianism. They then defend classical theism from the threat of modal collapse, while also briefly discussing the function of paradox in theology.

Having defended the metaphysical coherence between Buddhism and classical theism, the second part of the volume engages with and attempts a synthesis of the ethics and soteriology of Buddhist and Abrahamic traditions. Specifically, chapter 4 argues that Buddhist consequentialist and virtue-centred ethics are compatible with the divine command theory. According to McNabb and Baldwin, since God is identical to goodness itself and perfect happiness, loving God and following His commandments seems, as far as we can tell, to bring about the optimal good for most people. In respect to synthesizing Buddhist virtue ethics and divine command theory, this chapter argues that Buddhists could believe that God wants us to realize the interdependent nature of our existence and bring about our happiness and enlightenment by performing virtuous acts, and so God commands us to perform virtuous actions for our own happiness. McNabb and Baldwin also show that naturalistic interpretations of karma fit well with theism. Besides, the chapter analyses the overlap between the Five Precepts of Buddhism, Buddhism's Eightfold Path, and the Christian Ten Commandments.

Similarly, chapter 5 argues that the soteriology espoused in the Abrahamic traditions can be reconciled with the soteriology espoused by mere Buddhism. McNabb and Baldwin first survey the three Abrahamic traditions and show how each endorses the notion of salvation, which is a matter of 'being in union with God and enjoying his presence in the afterlife' (88). In contrast, the Buddhist tradition emphasizes liberation from suffering and the realization that all things are impermanent and interdependent. McNabb and Baldwin then argue that, although the theist notion of salvation and the Buddhist notion of liberation seem to be mutually incoherent, there is room for mutual accommodation. They point out that both traditions recognize selfish desires as one of the root reasons leading to suffering and the

ignorance of Ultimate Reality. Besides, McNabb and Baldwin argue that the God of classical theism could want His creatures to escape suffering in the way espoused by Buddhism.

Having offered a creative synthesis of classical theism and Buddhism, the last part of the volume entertains the question of whether the religious experience of classical theism and that of Buddhism is in fundamental tension or conflict. Chapter 6 first briefly surveys John Hick's Kantian religious pluralist hypothesis. Drawing on the work of Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, and William Lane Craig, the chapter provides reasons to reject Hick's view that all religious experience is mediated.

Chapter 7 offers an inclusive model for how classical theists could perceive the religious experiences reported by their Buddhist counterparts. Explicating the correspondence between emptiness and kenosis, the chapter argues that it is possible for both classical theists and Buddhists to have the same type of Buddhist experience of emptiness. Thus, the chapter further argues that it is possible for a classical theist to accept the fundamental metaphysical thesis of Buddhism and the thesis that ultimate reality has both personal and suprapersonal aspects. By integrating Buddhist views of two truths and the two sides of God, the chapter innovatively argues that the characteristic Buddhist religious experiences could map onto the 'far side' of God and the typical theistic religious experiences could map onto the 'near side' of God (120).

I propose two further points in favour of the general argument of the volume. First, double religious belonging has been practised for a long time in many parts of the world. In China, for instance, many people have identified themselves as Buddhist Daoist or Daoist Buddhist. They hold that Buddhism and Daoism are compatible and complementary, which suggests that they are sympathetic to the sort of inclusive approach to Buddhist metaphysics advocated by McNabb and Baldwin. And, second, Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of Buddha-nature, Dharmakaya, and One Mind show some affinity with theism in the broad sense. A discussion of the suprapersonal and personal implications of these key Mahāyāna Buddhist notions may further bridge the two traditions and inspire mutual learning.

Overall, this volume is an important contribution to the growing field of intercultural philosophy of religion. While focusing on mere Buddhism and classical theism, the volume also engages most of the major Buddhist traditions, theistic traditions, and the common objections to each, bringing fresh perspectives to bear on conceptual bridge-building between Buddhism and classical theism. The arguments of the volume raise many crucial questions, which will inspire Christian and Buddhist philosophers, practitioners, and all those interested in religious pluralism to continue the discussion and debate.

doi:10.1017/S0034412523000276

Byung-Chul Han *The Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*

(Cambridge: Polity, 2022). Pp. vii + 120. £12.99 (Pbk). ISBN 9781509545100.

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(Received 2 November 2022; accepted 7 November 2022; first published online 30 March 2023)