

Book Reviews

Sovereign Virtue, The Theory and Practice of Equality

RONALD DWORKIN, 2000

Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press

511 pp., \$35.00.

This book is the long awaited collection of Ronald Dworkin's work on equality. Dworkin is one of the best-known contributors to contemporary legal and political philosophy who also engages in public debates, for example by contributing to the *New York Review of Books*. Over the last two decades, he has developed an influential and comprehensive interpretation of equality as a political ideal, which has been published in several journals. This book brings them together and is presented as Dworkin's final answer to the question he raised for the first time in 1981, namely: *what is equality?*

Dworkin's approach throughout this book is captured well by his *abstract egalitarian principle*: "Government must act to make the lives of those it governs better lives, and it must show equal concern for the life of each" (128). His abstract egalitarian principle can be regarded as a general statement about equality as a normative ideal, about which differences between individuals should be seen as morally relevant — as inequalities — and, consequently, about which action government should take to mitigate these inequalities. To identify these morally relevant inequalities, the abstract egalitarian principle must be translated into a political theory. Dworkin proposes two candidates. He discusses and refutes *equality of welfare* and develops and defends *equality of resources*: "[E]quality in whatever resources are owned privately by individuals" (65).

This equality of resources is not a simple arithmetic equality; instead, the fate of individuals should be determined by decisions they make about how to live their lives and not by the circumstances in which they happen to find themselves (89). Differences in an individual's share of resources that result from *freely made choices* (spending or saving; working hard or not) are legitimate within resource equality. Choices are guided by ambitions, tastes, and beliefs about the good or successful life, and since individuals are responsible for ambitions, etc., they are also responsible for the consequences of their choices, whether positive or negative. On the other hand, differences in an individual's share of resources that result from differences in *circumstances* (positive: an IQ of 130; negative: severe disability) are seen as morally relevant. Dworkin proposes a redistribution of resources, for example to compensate for limited individual earning capacities, resulting from handicaps or lack of talents. This choice–circumstance distinction is the backbone of the book.

The book is divided in two parts: "theory" (chs. 1–7) and "practice" (chs. 8–14). The first two chapters concern the refutation of equality of welfare and the description of equality of resources. Subsequently, Dworkin discusses the relation between equality and freedom (ch. 3); political equality (ch. 4); the concept of community in

equality of resources (ch. 5); and the theory of the good life underlying such an egalitarian theory (ch. 6). Chapter 7 is an unpublished paper, in which Dworkin takes issue with two egalitarian theories that were presented as alternatives for equality of resources: G. A. Cohen's *Equal Access to Advantage* and Amartya Sen's *Capability Approach*. These 'theory' chapters present quite a complete outline of a theory of equality.

The practice chapters (part II) deal with a wide range of issues, generally from US politics and jurisprudence, of which most are intended as illustrations of the chapters in the first part. Chapter 8, discussing Clinton's 1993 health-care plan, and chapter 9, discussing the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, serve as illustrations of chapter 2. Chapter 10 discusses the question whether rules concerning expenditure limits in election campaigns are unconstitutional, in illustration of chapter 4. Chapters 11 and 12 discuss the effectiveness and fairness of affirmative action; chapter 13 discusses normative questions concerning genetic tests and cloning. The last chapter (14) concerns sexual morality (especially homosexuality) and the permissibility of euthanasia, which can be seen as an illustration of chapter 5.

Is this an important book? Yes and no. The book is important because Dworkin's approach of "equality of resources" is the cornerstone of contemporary egalitarian political theory. Arneson, Roemer, Van Parijs, Cohen, Kymlicka, to name a few, have started from Dworkin's normative framework and taken his choice-circumstance distinction as their premise — although they quibble where the line between choice and circumstance should be drawn exactly. In this egalitarian debate, Dworkin's work is even more important than Rawls's *Theory of Justice*. In that sense, Dworkin's work is seminal and important. Up to now, Dworkin's published work has been scattered in various journals and over a long time span. *Sovereign Virtue* brings all these articles together, and therefore the book is of major importance.

However, for those already familiar with Dworkin's work, *Sovereign Virtue* does not offer many new insights. There is only one interesting new chapter (7) in which Dworkin elaborates his position by replying to criticism by G. A. Cohen and Amartya Sen. Moreover, some arguments made in the first five chapters are merely refined in later ones. On the other hand, one very important article is missing in *Sovereign Virtue*, namely "Justice in the Distribution of Health Care" which is a more academic version of chapter 8 [1]. This article is important because it is one of the few in which Dworkin applies his theory of equality of resources to a real-world problem.

Most importantly, it is disappointing that Dworkin did not rewrite the papers into one single coherent argument and that he did not update his approach. After all, the central chapters were written two decades ago and generated much critique and discussion. It is disappointing that these articles are included in this book unaltered. In this respect, Dworkin misses Rawls's eager precision and systematic approach. Dworkin repeats himself several times because some chapters were originally written as independent papers, so that the main theme — equality of resources — is explained and re-explained several times.

Dworkin has proven to be extraordinarily creative in constructing an ideal theory of equality, but disappointingly unimaginative in its application in a theory of the second best. The choice-circumstance distinction is a helpful tool in criticizing actual instances of injustice. It is less clear, though, to what extent the distinction survives if used as a tool to create a new egalitarian policy because the clear distinction evaporates

in most actual decisions e.g. should lung cancer in the case of a moderate smoker be seen as resulting from choice or circumstance? Dworkin only rarely engages in these discussions, and his defence of a financial compensation for two categories of impaired persons (handicapped people and those lacking the talents to compete in the labour market) is only a minimal interpretation of the abstract egalitarian principle. This is a pity, because the proof of the pudding remains in the eating. Dworkin does not answer the question how actual governments should deal with the effects of involuntary disadvantages, resulting from less clear-cut causes than handicaps or lack of talent. For one thing, should governments invest in education so that children, regardless of their background, receive a proper education? After all, education is an evident element of equal opportunities, and a prerequisite capacity for responsible choice. Moreover, to what extent is cultural diversity relevant for the choice–circumstance distinction if, as Kymlicka argues, culture is the context of choice? [2] These are only two of many questions relevant for political theory but unanswered in *Sovereign Virtue*.

There is no doubt that Dworkin has left a mark on political philosophy and that *equality of resources* has altered the egalitarian debate. But the debates did not stop after the publication of the *What is Equality?* articles in 1981. It is disappointing that Dworkin does not engage in these debates. Except for Cohen and Sen, Dworkin does not reply to any of his critics. Dworkin's major innovation is his bridge between choice sensitivity and endowment insensitivity. By limiting the interpretation of endowments to obvious examples, ignoring possible other unchosen disadvantages, in *Sovereign Virtue* he does not come to the core of the problem. Therefore *Sovereign Virtue* will not have as great a new impact on the egalitarian debate as did the publication of the articles in *What is Equality?* in 1981 — if any at all.

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NOTES

[1] *McGill Law Journal* 38, 3 (1993), 884–898.

[2] WILL KYMLICKA (1995) *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford University Press.

Inclusion and Democracy

IRIS MARION YOUNG, 2000

Oxford, Oxford University Press

314 pp., £19.99 (hardback)

Deliberative Democracy and Beyond

JOHN DRYZEK, 2000

Oxford, Oxford University Press

206 pp., £19.99 (hardback)

In recent political theory, there has been a “discursive turn” that has particularly influenced democratic theory, identifying democratic government as relying on deliberation on public affairs. The works of Iris Marion Young and John Dryzek are both

related to that conception of democracy by their common claims for further integration of oppressed minorities such as women and indigenous people, and, in Dryzek's case, for new political concerns such as for the environment, future generations, rights of animals and so on.

Young's theory of democracy is based on the idea that democratic deliberation should consist of a variety of voices and groups articulating their interests and experiences to the public. One of her crucial points is that the liberal distinction between public and private is incoherent and presumably oppressive in relation to the situation of women, children, ethnic minorities and so on. The demand for articulation of experiences and interests is the most original part of Young's deliberative democratic theory, in that she includes particular experiences and interests that are usually defined as unacceptable or irrelevant in other theories of discursive democracy, either because of their allegedly factional character — not responding to the common good — or because of their allegedly private character — falling outside the realm of politics. The idea that different voices and experiences are articulated in a public discussion in a democratic polity is different from common deliberative ideas where the deliberative public is presumably without any special experience or special voices. The articulation of particular interests is not intended to replace any idea about the common good but to count other experiences and values within it. Young regards the establishment of media, associations and so on by various minorities as a crucial part of the integration of new voices in democratic deliberation. In that sense, she envisages a re-creation of a democratic public by the introduction of public arenas of minorities. The representation of many voices, however, is also a benefit per se as, according to Young, it gives political recognition to groups. However, she does not clearly explain *why* political recognition is valuable. There are obvious answers such as that it gives better chances to increase one's share of resources in a society, but Young means that recognition in a polity is a good per se. She rejects consociational ideas that such representation is justified insofar as it increases social peace or is a way to reduce dangerous conflicts. Young's discussion, however, shows the problems arising if pressure-groups act like factions to protect their own interests. She gives an example of police opposition to a civic auditory council. The problem is then how to distinguish between actual and alleged factions.

Neither Young nor Dryzek clearly respond to the dilemma of deliberative democracy: whether politics is a quest for a "right answer" that democratic deliberation is the best way to reach or whether deliberative democracy has an inherent value. In such cases, it is unclear whether Young's argument for increased representation of, for example, women and minorities, or Dryzek's argument about how environmental concerns should be integrated in politics, are pragmatically good because they yield the right answer or whether they are valuable because of the practices prior to the decision. Young does not clarify whether her justification of deliberative politics is another version of a proceduralist justification of democracy or whether it is based on considerations of outcome.

The deliberative public in Young's model also assumes a civic role of auditing the government beyond the models of separation of powers. She regards the establishment of public bodies relying on active civic participation as diminishing principal/agent problems in public administration by active control, an idea that lies within a radical democratic tradition related to associational democracy as well as to Marxist ideas on the active control of the people of the state. Young and Dryzek both apparently reject

the separation of different branches of government in the tradition of Montesquieu and Madison and prefer a participationist model of democracy. Young does not clarify whether her ideas of civic auditing of government should be a review of legality or a review of policies in general and she does not clarify how such reviews are related to judicial review of the different branches of government. That lack of clarity is a reflection of the lack of clarity regarding the difference, if any between legal reasoning and political reasoning in general. The dilemma is, however, that if there is no difference between law and politics and hence between legal and political reasoning, it becomes debatable whether there should be any difference between judicial decisions, administrative decisions and policy decisions. If there should not be any difference between these kinds of decisions, it is hard to see how any efficient governance of the state (not to mention democratic governance of other agencies), with any due respect for individual security, is to be attained. Dryzek does not examine the relationship between law and politics, nor how political decision-making should be different from legal (judicial and administrative) decision-making, nor how collective self-government should be articulated in law.

In that sense her idea is quite close to Dryzek's model of a discursive democracy. This has numerous features in common with models of radical democracy. While Young's theory incorporates divisions of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, Dryzek's main preoccupation is the relation between deliberative democracy and capitalism. Here his assumption is that the unequal distribution of economic resources might alter the distribution of political resources. Economic inequalities are, however, just one aspect of the inequalities that, according to Young, distort the distribution of political resources in a democracy.

Dryzek situates the idea of deliberative democracy in a "reflective modernity" demanding a critical orientation against the socio-economic order as a means of attaining a necessary neutrality. (He questions postmodernist ideas that rationality and neutrality are unattainable ideals just working as pretexts for power and dominance although he does not deny that they might well be that.) The need for a critical orientation and informed political decisions bears comparison with the minimal demands of liberal democracy where critical orientation and information are an important device for rationality and hence for self-government. Young's theory of the public arena with its multiplicity of voices assumes a similar rationality as it is hard to see any certain need for a public arena if the only purpose is to secure fair representation to special groups.

The idea that decisions should be informed and reflective on a collective level, however, seems to include that they should be informed and reflective on an individual level in Dryzek's theory. That means that there are great similarities between theories of autonomous decisions and of collective autonomy. The critical view of the social order includes a critical view of the political order, and in cases of a deliberative democracy, also a critical orientation on the deliberative democratic order. Dryzek's democratic theory is a justificatory principle with certain material consequences. These include demands for less unequal distribution of political resources when the present distribution can be regarded as an obstacle to deliberative democracy. They do not, however, exclude different models of decision making at different levels of government if these models are reconcilable with the demands of deliberative democracy.

What conclusions can be drawn on the principles for a democratic body politic? Young and Dryzek link deliberation, democratic control of government and a democratic

public providing opportunities for democratic deliberation. Their common assumption is that democratic politics requires not just political equality but that policies in a democratic polity should be formed under conditions of equality. In that sense the approaches of Dryzek and Young include demand for fair procedures, even if it is hard to distinguish them in their models of democracy as they have in common that their demands if met would result in a democracy that would, to some extent, be procedurally better. Young and Dryzek conceptualise democracy as a form of government that constitutes society as a whole rather than limiting it to government meeting their requirements of deliberation, pluralism and critical orientation. Their views seem fairly coherent in their normative discussion on bases for political decisions where there is a symmetry between autonomy, informed consent and informed decisions on the personal and collective levels, and where rationality in the sense of inner consistency governs informed decisions. There is, on the other hand, a greater conflict between an epistemic conception of democracy based on a perfectionist idea of politics, and the interest-based conception of democracy justified in terms of procedural fairness to different groups and interests. However, at least Young seems to accept the concept of the common good as a basis for the polity. The societal demands of democracy include freedom of speech and association that are included in “minimalist” conceptions of democracy but also public recognition of identities that might conflict with demands of the public sphere.

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Philosophies of Exclusion: Liberal Political Theory and Immigration

PHILLIP COLE, 2000

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

£16.95 pb

Citizenship and National Identity

DAVID MILLER, 2000

Cambridge, Polity Press

£14.99 pb

Questions of borders and boundaries, and of the value, if any, of national allegiances have become central to contemporary political philosophy, and these two books make distinguished contributions to the topic. One of the striking features of the books is that each author claims to swim against the current, while presenting opposed theses to each other. David Miller expects that his arguments for national community as the underpinning for democracy and social justice will be greeted as heresies by an impromptu coalition of cosmopolitans and multiculturalists. Phillip Cole argues that hegemonic liberal political theory contains no resources with which to justify one of the most prominent of the modern state’s powers, namely its control of admission to membership, while at the same time wanting to justify that power. This, he insists, is a position which most liberals (that is, most political philosophers) are unwilling to admit. Underlying this disagreement is an important difference over what sort of good membership of

a political community is: is it, as Joseph Carens has suggested, the kind of arbitrary accident of birth, akin to a feudal privilege, which liberalism ought to annul? Or is it, as more communitarian-minded authors such as Miller and Michael Walzer think, a substantive and culturally variable achievement which may legitimately be protected? Miller and Cole may both be right about the reception their claims will receive, which suggests that this is a particularly lively moment for thinking about this issue.

The crux of Cole's case is that there is a tension between the liberal principle of moral equality and state control of membership. He tenaciously chases down claims that there are valid liberal grounds on which to restrict membership of a state. In doing so, he sharply criticises arguments based on freedom of association, cultural integrity, national identity, and a Hobbesian conception of the state. His book is full of interesting arguments, contains elegant and informed discussions of many authors including Miller, Tamir and Walzer, and is plainly essential reading for anyone interested in this topic. That said, I am not sure that all of his arguments are compelling. Consider two examples. Cole makes great play of the liberal requirement of consensus: so, for example, it is illegitimate to impose a rationing scheme to regulate immigration (say, a lottery among applicants) since this would not, presumably, win all applicants' agreement, and anyway in the nature of the case applicants have not had the opportunity to consent or express dissent within the political process of that country. By contrast, justifications for rationing of health care rely on the underlying principle of consent. But it is not at all obvious that the reason a lottery may be fair in allocating a scarce resource — the *prima facie* equality of each claimant's needs — requires that each claimant in fact accept the lottery as a fair mechanism: I may play the game in spite of rejecting its rules, if it's the only game in town. Yet my rejection does not imply that it is an unfair system. Second, Cole's representation of those who argue for bounded citizenship, such as Miller, is overly harsh: it is not the case that "members of the liberal polity have no political obligations whatsoever to those outside its boundaries" (194). Miller in chapter 10 of his book under review and elsewhere makes space for obligations to others, but insists that they are of a different order to obligations owed to fellow citizens. But Cole's discussions here provide a rich resource on a fascinating subject.

The upshot of Cole's argument seems to be something like Carl Schmitt's evaluation of liberalism as resting on an apparent principle of openness which, whenever challenged by serious disagreement, is unmasked as a commitment to a particular way of life, to be imposed as necessary on those who dislike it. Yet Cole's own conclusions are different. First, he sympathises with moral and institutional cosmopolitanism — although this is a *much* more prominent line of thought in recent liberal political philosophy than his text suggests (consider the work in this area of Onora O'Neill, Charles Beitz, Thomas Pogge, Brian Barry, Charles Jones, Martha Nussbaum, and David Held, among others). But it doesn't follow from his criticism of the liberal justifications for exclusion that there is "an inevitable attraction to an order in which individuals and groups have their integrity protected by internationally recognised rights, rather than having to depend upon rights conferred by a nation-state" (201–202). All Cole's argument shows is that there are no liberal grounds for preventing people from entering a state. This does not preclude a wide degree of variation in what rights and duties you have once you cross the border. Accepting this allows back in some of the particularism about the good of political membership alluded to by Miller and others.

Second, he argues that this failure on the part of liberalism exposes the shaping impact of Europe's imperial history on its political thought. This too is better covered ground than Cole suggests (in the work of James Tully, Uday Mehta, Barbara Arneil, among others). The connection between colonialism and the theoretical problem of immigration is obscure, however, and Cole's closing remarks on the role of 'the outside' in constituting the character of the liberal state are interesting but sketchy. Some states have had ethnically based policies of exclusion, without the kind of colonial ties that characterise France and Britain: the United States, for example, was for a long time principally concerned with keeping out the wrong sort of European. (Of course, the USA is itself the product of imperialism.) The state's claim to control its borders requires a more sophisticated and historical genealogy: its findings may well harmonise with Cole's substantive philosophical conclusions. (Tom Baldwin's essay on *The Territorial State*, in Hyman Gross and Ross Harrison (eds.), *Jurisprudence: Cambridge Essays* (Oxford, 1992) is still the best philosophical study of the state's claim to jurisdiction of a specific territory.)

The essays gathered in Miller's book elaborate the perspective of his 1995 *On Nationality*. National identity, understood as a blend of subjective and objective features of a population, underpins the ethical relationships which promote deliberative democracy and social justice. He argues against cosmopolitans for 'bounded citizenship', that it is only within a determinate community that diverse individuals and groups can all live under laws they find legitimate. Against liberals, he argues for an active republican conception of citizenship, focused on duties rather than rights. And against multiculturalists, he argues that it is only where there is a shared sense of national identity that different groups can hope to be treated fairly by one another. Here too there is great deal to take issue with — as many readers of this journal will know. Miller develops his arguments in an immensely lucid and engaging way, and this is an important contribution to a range of contemporary debates in political theory.

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Politikwissenschaft und politisches Denken

WILHELM HENNIS, 2000

Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck

VI + 386 pp., EURO 49.00 (hb), EURO 24.00 (pb)

That practical philosophy was not merely his academic passion, Wilhelm Hennis spectacularly proved last year. Using Germany's most prominent weekly as a launch pad, he forcefully appealed to its readers to swamp the public prosecutor of Cologne with letters of protest in order to make him persevere with the investigation into the alleged disappearance of sensitive files at the end of Helmut Kohl's chancellorship. Even before this public outcry, Hennis had been at loggerheads with what he lambasted as an irresponsible dilution of accountability which he observed in the Kohl government's habit of taking pivotal decisions in privy circles beyond the grasp of parliament.

Having worked as an aide to an MP, Hennis knew from first-hand experience what he would later plumb in many books, articles and speeches. His prime commitment was to resurrecting a notion of political science that had all but vanished, as this time-honoured discipline had been submerged in the rising tide of a rather abstract, lacklustre rationalism. This development ended up eclipsing the very idea of political science as an independent branch of academic study, so much so that it had to be virtually reinvented in post-war Germany. By that time, the likes of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes and Kant had made the running with their fateful emphasis on philosophy as a theoretical rather than practical science. This rarefied brand of philosophy set itself the task of starting from scratch when sketching out the conditions under which a polity could thrive. Hennis pours scorn on a philosophical attitude that wantonly shuns any contextualisation and discards the necessity of a normative texture as the only viable foundation of states. He draws on the thoughts of Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville and Michael Oakeshott, who dedicated their philosophical works to delineating the limits of rationalism as the driving force behind political decision-making. This in certain respects more modest approach cannot but have profound methodological repercussions. "It is the importance of the object, not the degree of attainable exactness, that determines the hierarchy and preponderance of disciplines." (p. 36). Therefore, Hennis has recourse to the ancient tool of logical topics as a means of delving into existing knowledge as the unrivalled fount of practical wisdom.

Building on this philosophical groundwork, Hennis at times weighed in with caustic remarks whenever political debates seemed to fall foul of the practical imperative which he deems the sole reliable compass of statesmanship. In a classic article from 1969, Hennis fiercely contested the idea of rendering democracy the principal mode of all social organisation, thereby overstretching what had hitherto been the solution to a genuinely political problem to equally inform professional arrangements and even family ties. Hennis derided this itch for all-out democratisation as the 'envy of Adam' (p. 223) insofar as the first man was created without the irksome need for a prolonged maturation process. Unless this need is denied point-blank, talk of across-the-board democratisation must rank as both a vile and dangerous pipe-dream.

At about the same time, Hennis lashed out against lofty projects of social engineering which bulked large on the agenda of social scientists turned political consultants. This particular form of societal technique, which mirrors the *carte blanche* given to a polity without shared morality, is predicated on precarious assumptions alone. For attempting to impose far-reaching purposes according to a preordained pattern of development flies flat in the face of the peculiar — gradual, that is — logic of families, civic and religious communities.

Throwing down the gauntlet to Juergen Habermas, Hennis made another seminal contribution to the stature of practical philosophy. His strictures on Habermas' climbing onto the bandwagon of 'late capitalism' critique essentially point in two directions. On the one hand, Hennis casts doubt on the much-vaunted 'problem of legitimacy' which purportedly plagued Western societies in the 1970s. By trying to denounce the merely 'formal' character of democracy in capitalist countries, Habermas construes a shaky theoretical edifice which makes light of the real, if visceral, linchpins of legitimacy, such as one's religious affiliation or nation. On the other hand, Hennis rejects the back-to-the-roots romanticism of a 'classic' democracy. In his eyes, legitimacy hinges fundamentally on historically contingent prerequisites which cannot be conjured up at will.

Hennis is at his best when putting his finger on the far-fetched claims of purely theoretical or constructivist approaches which do not care to expose their findings to the litmus test of practical viability. The history of the twentieth century gives the lie to those who favoured starting from scratch as the short-cut to more humane societies. Besides, Hennis aptly flays the more Gilbertian outbursts of jargon-ridden social sciences. Yet Hennis' steadfast insistence on historical experience and precedence as the milestones to go by begs the question of how to fit changing circumstances — and change they have since Greek antiquity — into a hallowed canon of values. He must admit that traditional, value-based, not slickly constructivist politics holds out a possibility rather than spelling out a reality. As so often, theoretical prowess in analysing politics wedded to a practical sense of reality when it comes to implementing change bids fair to strike a feasible balance between two unreconstructed extremes.

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Transformations of Mind. Philosophy as Spiritual Practice

MICHAEL MCGHEE, 2000

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

293 pp. £13.95 pb

English flautists, with their wooden instruments, used to sneer at their continental colleagues and their unmanly concern with such flummeries as beauty of tone. For too long, the same kind of attitude pervaded philosophy on these shores. Engagement with “continental” thought, at least German and French, is now happily widespread. The intellectual traditions of other civilizations have not, however, fared so well, and that for what is conceived as a good reason: the linguistic obstacles are viewed as formidable. It is not just the original texts that remain unread; there is, showing up our tunnel vision, an enormous amount of research on Indian Philosophy (and on Buddhism in particular) conducted and published in Japanese: how many professionals here have access to that? Even nearer home the situation is parlous; most people would be suprised to hear that there is such a phenomenon as a vigorous Latin American philosophy — five centuries of happy ignorance in that area.

Up to about a generation ago, Sanskrit scholars had tended to focus on two main interests: religion and literature. The exception to this was in the field of Buddhist studies where philosophy loomed large, chiefly because the Buddhist tradition was considered (wrongly as it turned out) to represent a kind of rationalist agnosticism uniquely compatible with modernity and the spirit of science. Then came the American occupation of Japan and then the wars in Korea and Vietnam. There, educated soldiers discovered not the Buddhism of Scriptures and manuals but Buddhist practice, monastic life and, above all, meditation. A significant number of G.I.s stayed on to become ordained as monks, then, back in the West fuelled the boom in interest in Oriental traditions among people turning away from a murderous Western heritage. At the same time a new kind of *philosophes* appeared on the scene, that is the sophisticated “Orientals” thoroughly grounded in both their native tradition

(mostly Indian Hindu and Japanese Buddhist) and in the diverse strands of Western philosophy. Notable names come to mind: B. K. Matilal, J. N. Mohanty, Margaret Chatterjee as well as the members of the Kyoto School. A process of cross-fertilization had begun which, with the publication of increasingly accurate translations of key texts allowed both non-specialist scholars and practitioners to engage with the intricacies of some twenty-four centuries of constantly evolving debates in all fields of Eastern thought.

Michael McGhee has taken a decisive step further in that process of response to an “intercultural canon” with work that began in the late eighties in, as he once put it, an “. . . attempt to naturalize into a Western philosophical context concepts that derive from the practice of Buddhist meditation.” The present volume is, so far, the culmination of that process.

This work is, first of all, startlingly *personal*, autobiographical in the most intimate and candid way. The reader is buttonholed. The first word is: “Listen . . .” Tanabe Hajime is reported as saying that “If you want to be a philosopher you need to confess your sins and repent.” That is just what the author proceeds to do in a series of intense conversations and reminiscences, not least because the identification of the causes of suffering is the condition for healing, a cardinal Buddhist principle. This, then, is the examined life, philosophy at both its most basic and sophisticated, grounded in the meditative silence from which states of mind emerge that then coalesce into ever-shifting conformations, the bases for our very apprehension of the world and ourselves and hence of our actions. This is philosophy based in mindful experience, not even “doing” philosophy but living it, as a way of life, as indeed it should be for a Buddhist. McGhee is Buddhist not in the sense of believing in certain tenets but rather that of being a practitioner, a dharma-worker, the practice being of the mutually reinforcing ethics and (above all) meditation. Here nothing is ever taken for granted and whatever is the case is allowed to reveal itself to the silent mind. The illumination of the implications of the co-dependent arising of all phenomena in turn results in self-renunciation and the development of the complementary qualities of wisdom and compassion.

I have a few niggles. The first, perhaps falderal, concerns the use of the term “spiritual”, which, detached from the Christian context where it has a most specific meaning and potent connotations, sounds somewhat New Agey. Then, in the context of philosophy, spirituality may only be meaningful in the most minimalist sense, that of the pursuit of values. Further, the term may also be misleading in connection with Buddhism, which maintains that consciousness and materiality are co-dependent and where the highest reaches of meditation transcend both consciousness and non-consciousness. McGhee does acknowledge that meditation does not just concern the mind but also the body. True, but then there is no attempt in non-tantric forms of Buddhism to “spiritualize” the body or the mind, but rather to regulate the one and purify the other. The author’s deliberations on Platonic *eros* could have taken a different turn. This leads me to another point: McGhee clearly views Buddhism through the lens of the teachings of Sangharakshita, founder of the Western Buddhist order. This non-monastic interpretation of the tradition seeks to re-express the “essential truths” of Buddhism so as to make them relevant to contemporary life. The problem here is that there is no such thing as a “timeless core” of Buddhism since that is pure process thinking. Like all compounded objects/beings it has no enduring “soul”, it flows, ebbs

and will vanish. Furthermore, the practice of meditation is not preconception-free, detachable from specific doctrines and world-views not shared by all Buddhists; it is theory-laden, fuelled by expectations and faith and profoundly culture-specific. On the other hand, what has just been said may to some extent justify Sangharakshita's eclectic reinvention of the tradition and his placing himself at the origin of his own lineage. However, I would find that rather worrying, since the Buddha founded a monastic community where legitimacy depends on an unbroken lineage of ordination from the originator.

I was once asked how I could possibly teach Indian philosophy to students with no Sanskrit. Perhaps I could question how one can discuss Buddhist thought without — as is evident here — having direct access to the original sources. However, Eastern and particularly Indian thinkers having always shunned autobiography, what we have in this book is the story of a profoundly searching Western mind, steeped in European high culture and philosophy and invigorated by a very new conception of Buddhist praxis. This work, rich, dense, though at times elusive, has a pedigree among the eccentrics of Western thought that runs from Augustine through Montaigne and Kierkegaard to Nietzsche. For all its quirks, it makes for a provocative and rewarding ruminative reading. “Meditational experience leads us into the unfamiliar, but perhaps also to a position from which the familiar becomes strange.” Spot on.

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