

ing control of a person's "soul" (Burmese: *leikpya*, 77), when we are made to understand that the denial of an enduring "self" or "soul" (Sanskrit: *ātman*; Pali: *atta*) is a cornerstone of Pali Buddhist thought.

In all *The Buddha's Wizards* represents a work of lucid scholarship on a novel topic of interest not only to students of Theravada Buddhism but also to ethnographers, theorists of affect, and historians of religion. Patton presents an eminently readable work with theoretical engagements germane to the times, made all the more enjoyable by his personal anecdotes and obvious investment in his subjects and subject matter.

Endnotes

¹ Patton references McDaniel (2011: 17, 37, 110) and Hayashi (2000).

² We are also told in passing of a corpus of unpublished Burmese Buddhist texts describing esoteric practices associated with the *weizzā*, such as the *Kappālanīkāra*, explaining "the meaning and varieties of a number of magical diagrams and spells used for a wide range of aims, such as achieving immortality, gaining supernatural powers, and averting danger" (4).

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Review Essay: Once More on Religion and Magic: Daniel Dubuisson's Religion and Magic in Western Culture

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In *Religion and Magic in Western Culture*, Daniel Dubuisson ventures into a debate as old as the social and human sciences. On the one hand, the analytic binary of religion and magic has been—more or less explicitly—a staple of academic theorizing for over a century, and scholars have persistently and variously attempted to define and defend both halves of this binary. On the other hand, religion and magic has also been criticized for almost as long (far longer, in fact, than more recent critiques of the category of religion) with critics pointing out that despite the ongoing efforts of their colleagues to better articulate

this binary, the pairing of religion and magic has never attained a useful level of descriptive or analytic utility and continues to carry pernicious evaluative connotations. Over the course of this century-plus debate, matters have proceeded in an almost dialectical manner: defenders offer some element, distinction, or function intended to better refine the interpretative capacities of religion and magic (usually in response to some critique), while critics reassert that each of these efforts, at best, lacks precision when put into practice, and, at worst, performs Western ethnocentrism, reinscribing, in some new register, the same old analytic, descriptive, and evaluative problems.

Dubuisson's book engages both aspects of this debate, at once deconstructing the religion/magic binary as well as attempting to rehabilitate magic

as a solo category. He is critical of religion and magic as an analytic unit, and rightly identifies how magic has been a complicit category in, what Dubuisson has called elsewhere, the Western construction of the ideology of religion (i.e. the largely intellectual (mis)representation of Europe's modern, indigenous category of religion as though it identified a cross-cultural, universal aspect of human experience). Yet Dubuisson also aims to provide a theoretical framework for recovering magic, or, as he terms it, "magisms" and "magical processes," such that these might stand apart from the "shadow of religion" and be recognized in their own particularity (181). For Dubuisson, the main issue at stake is the negative stigma long attached to magic; once this is removed, scholars can more constructively "acquire an image of magic" that is "less caricatured" and "more human" (54). Such an image—and one not constructed on a "monotheistic model" (181)—would be helpful for historians of religion in generating better descriptions of magical procedures and the material, social, and ultimately cognitive causes of these procedures, which, in turn, might foster better scholarly comparisons and analyses.

Dubuisson's text is divided into three main chapters, buttressed by an introduction and conclusion, with each chapter helpfully subdivided to guide the reader along the way. Most of the text—namely, chapters 1 and 2—is dedicated to diagnosing the evaluative problems attendant to religion and magic as an analytic binary and to mounting a critique of its stubborn persistence in Western (specifically, scholarly) discourse. In sum, Dubuisson's first two chapters demonstrate that the lingering conjunction of religion and magic is "the result of a scholarly process" but nevertheless has been persistently misrecognized and naturalized as if it were a universal pair that manifests itself in all human cultures (178). In making his case, Dubuisson rests this overall argument on two fundamental premises. The first premise states resolutely that the Catholic Church invented "the malevolent, demonic conception of magic" and that this institution is ultimately responsible for its connection to religion (1). Early Christian writers found magic a useful contrast category in arguing for the legitimacy and normative boundaries of their institutions and the views of history and the cosmos that accompanied these. This contrast was only amplified and reinforced with the later cultural hegemony of the church in Europe, which added a set of diabolic and criminal associations and assisted in "inlaying" these in the "bodies and consciences of individuals" as quotidian Western knowledge ("doxa") (110). Dubuisson's second premise further pursues the ide-

ological implications of the disparity and the hierarchy implied in the religion/magic binary. In short, if religion has been an important ideological artifice for constructing and orienting wider normative cultural dynamics in the West more generally, then magic in particular "represents...one of the most necessary ideological foundations to the development of the idea of religion" (1). That is, magic has proved a valuable structural Other for religion, a class complement that has been indispensable for indemnifying religion as a discrete category, primarily by taking onto itself all those unruly aspects perceived as inimical to religion's purity and universality.

Yet if the Catholic Church gave initial substance and durability to religion and magic, the main ideologues of interest for Dubuisson—and those responsible for raising this pair to the level of a universal anthropological taxonomy—are the scholars who participated in the nineteenth and early twentieth century enterprise of the "science of religions," an enterprise that lent many of its intellectual and, for Dubuisson, theological positions to the contemporary discipline of religious studies. Unmoored from its originating Catholic power structures, religion/magic remained a theological interpretive schema even when applied in the burgeoning (putatively non-theological) disciplines of the social and human sciences. Specifically, in the wider context of a world enlarged by modern colonial efforts and with European scholars attempting to devise categories with which to cognize non-Europeans (and often their supposed inferiority), magic remained the material, "trivial," and stigmatized opposite of the "spiritual ideal" of religion (25), with Protestant Christianity rather than the Catholic Church in place as the normative Christian template for religion. This binary could be (to put it perhaps too simplistically) applied variously as an index of cultural evolution as magic developed into religion (Tylor and Frazer), or it could demarcate more synchronic social (religion) and antisocial (magic) distinctions within a given culture (Durkheimians). Indeed, Dubuisson's reading of Marcel Mauss's famous essay *A General Theory of Magic* in chapter 1 stands in his analysis as a microcosm of how the theological valences of religion and magic were "translated, transposed, metabolized . . . in sociological terms" (31).

One way of situating Dubuisson's first two chapters is as a refinement and augmentation of his critique of the ideology of religion, which he has written at length about elsewhere, specifically in his rightly celebrated *The Western Construction of Religion* (Dubuisson 2003). To be sure, in the present work, Dubuisson adds a number of flourishes to his critique

that might repay more detailed consideration than can be discussed here. In general though, the concept of magic adds to Dubuisson's critique of religion ideology insofar as it presents a specific object lesson in the kinds of local cultural casualties that result from the conceptual hegemony of Western religion ideology. Chapter 3, the shortest but most constructive of his chapters, specifically sets its sights on rehabilitating a conception of magic when not "deformed" or "blackened"—to cite but two instances of the sorts of punitive adjectives Dubuisson uses throughout—by religion, as it has been for centuries (178). To this end, Dubuisson offers the alternative terminology of "magisms" and/or "magical processes." That is, magism offers a category that would identify "phenomena that merit other approaches than those reflected in the debased, worn-out word 'magic,'" it "owe[s] nothing to religion," and, in addition, it avoids all the "negative connotations" of magic (5, 181). For Dubuisson, orienting oneself to the dynamics of magical processes "enlarges the distance" between the distorting negative valences given to magic in the West and its potential use as a larger anthropological category of analysis. This, in turn, allows those traditionally derided beliefs and practices to "recover their own identity" without the stigma of the primitive and/or marginal (138).¹

Dubuisson's alternative nomenclature is premised on the basic question: if magic only appears by "the light cast by the Christian religion" (29) and its subsequent ideology of religion, especially as the pilloried Other to religion, what then is left when not seen in or with this light? On the one hand, a more "postmodern" or Foucauldian-type view might answer that the binary of religion and magic has persistently generated the objects of its own discourse. Therefore, when dissolved, the presumed evidences of magic dissolve with it and might impel scholars to reorganize those items heretofore parceled out as religion and magic under more refined rubrics. Indeed, Dubuisson's neologisms gesture in some capacity in this direction. However, for Dubuisson, clicking off the light of Christian religion (to follow through on his metaphor) ultimately helps us see what has been there, obscured, the whole time. In the absence of religion ideology, what is left is a substantial and discrete remainder of beliefs and practices that, for Dubuisson, present "striking homologues in a large number of other cultures" and constitute an anthropological "ensemble" (156, 139). Dubuisson sees the structural stability of these beliefs and practices as a constant referent whose conceptualization and internal logic can be construed inde-

pendently of religion. On this view, religion and magic are, in principle, analytically and descriptively separable, each able to go its own theoretical way and belonging "to different cultural and mental universes" (177). For Dubuisson, then, in rehabilitating magic, what needs adjusting are first and foremost the categories that we use to see the precise contours of these procedures and their unifying features across different social and cultural locales. In other words, we must adjust and hone the signifiers rather than reconsider the things they putatively signify.

The first critical questions we might ask of Dubuisson then are: does attention to "magism(s)" or "magical procedures" offer more nimble analytic concepts than a traditional concept of "magic"? Do these put into better focus cultural data so that we might discover a coherent set of practices and beliefs that constitute a discrete object of inquiry? Of course, the problem—and one that has nagged those intent on rehabilitating magic for some time—is that once one removes the evaluative coding of religion as in some way "good" and magic as in some way "bad," it becomes much more difficult to specify formal or functional differences between, say, two "religious" rituals and a religious ritual and a "magical" ritual. One must include some other set of formal criteria that distinguishes magic—and not only from religion but also from all other areas of human practice. As we will see, Dubuisson does in fact enumerate such a litany of formal features, but in doing so he seems merely to invert the above problem, arguing that "a claimed universality of the religious will be able to be reversed and will illustrate henceforth, rather, a universality of magic, or, more exactly, of magic processes" (139). On this view, magism already risks becoming too capacious a category, perhaps indistinguishable from the categories used to discuss human ritual activity more generally. In that case, why are such new terminologies necessary?

As it turns out, the domain of magisms outlined by Dubuisson in chapter 3 is more specific, though no less universal. Dubuisson's description of the domain he sees as proper to magisms bears a remarkable resemblance to the world scholars once called primitive, with the main difference being that this world is now thematized without the traditional stigma. Indeed, the overall impression one gets from Dubuisson is that minus the traditional negative stigma inherited from Christian theology and its specific manifestation in an earlier primitive religions paradigm, earlier theorists of magic do in fact succeed in outlining a domain proper to magic. However, I would argue that even without the traditional nega-

tive evaluations, Dubuisson's attempt to delimit this domain as magism and elevate it to a "major dimension" (i.e. universal aspect) of human cultures (170–71)—independent from religion—ends up recalibrating a binary of religion and magic on a particular view of social mediation, with its implicit evaluative hierarchy simply reversed and redeployed.

To begin with, it's worth noting that one can detect in Dubuisson's analysis both a classical view of Marxist ideology as well as resonances of an old Protestant historiographic critique of Catholicism.² Both of these views share the conviction that underneath the obfuscating encrustations of ideological (i.e., religious) false consciousness or church tradition, one can discover a more pristine, "real," coherent, and even material set of beliefs and practices uncomplicated by later intellectual maneuverings. Such a view influenced Tylor, Frazer, and early theorists of religion and magic insofar as part of their general interest in primitive societies and in magic as a privileged marker of these, was the appeal of glimpsing those rudimentary, practical, and unadorned ritual skills that could harness power to directly affect the world, and were free of the later mediations, rationalizations, and distortions of (priestly, Christian) religion (and which perhaps provided a nascent view of the later ambitions of modern science). To put it in starkly Marxist terms, if, for Dubuisson, the ideology of religion he critiques operates like superstructure insofar as it can be described as rigid, universal (at least in its aspirations), imperialistic, and produced and reinforced by the philosophical and doctrinal machinations of the Catholic Church (and later the modern Academy), then, by contrast, the world he sees as proper to magisms is the basic, unfetishized sphere of the local, namely, the "small worlds" and "living universe[s]" (175–78, 158–63) that are "more supple, endowed with plasticity, and capable of transformation, of metamorphosis over time as a function of circumstances" (139). These small worlds have no need for "absolute dualisms" or "insurmountable boundaries" (158) or concepts such as orthodoxy, revelation, or doctrine. The world of magic, for Dubuisson, focuses on the everyday and existential contingencies of human life—health, wealth, and a good harvest. It is the orthopraxic domain where one encounters the mundane interactions of "human agents ... ritualized words and actions, as well as banal and insignificant objects," and whose "fundamental characteristic" is the "highly symbolic" universe in which these interact (140). Through such words and actions, the "magician" is able to directly access a world connected by "sympathetic associations" (142) and guide the "sui generis force" that

flows through this network of associations toward specific material and practical ends both for good and ill (144–46). Finally, if Dubuisson casts the elitist, hegemonic, and generally smothering nature of Christian religion ideology in markedly negative terms, the "centre of gravity" affected by his notion of magism he sees might give to the "ensemble of the anthropological universe," to which magical procedures belong, "a noble title" (139).

Dubuisson's description of a world and procedures proper to magisms specifically draws from the familiar repertoire of earlier scholarship, resonating with Marret's "magico-religious" and "mana," Lucien Levy-Bruhl's "primitive mentality," and Malinowski's notion of magic's unmediated effects and practically oriented actions. Again Dubuisson seems to indicate that the primary failing of these analysts was evaluative, and, without the distortions of their implicit Christian bias, much from their analyses provides a workable set of features by which to theorize magic-qua-magisms. Dubuisson makes this point explicitly when he returns to Mauss, his guiding exemplar, in chapter 3, identifying Mauss's main failure as not recognizing the "negative judgment that Western culture, influenced by Catholic theology, brought to this same magic" (165–66).

In fact, for Dubuisson, even the late nineteenth and early twentieth century debates over the "origins of religion" can be salvaged when taken not in the negative crucible of primitive religion, but rather in terms of "the psycho-cognitive dimension" (174). Dubuisson grounds the world of magical processes in a universal concept of "human nature" and its experiential "common base" that in turn generates an account resembling the just-so "intellectualist" narratives (of say, Tylor) from a century ago (168). Specifically, that the common experience of humans and their communities confronting the exigencies of existence (especially, the troublesome knowledge that it will end) form something like a "psychic unity of mankind" from which magical systems develop. That these magical systems show persistent features across different cultures is indicative, for Dubuisson, of "a repertoire of similar images born of comparable experiences" as humans attempt to secure the basics of material security (167). Thus, for Dubuisson, the origins of magic are not *in illo tempore* as they were for Tylor, Frazer, et al., nor are they even historically rooted, but rather they emerge in the ahistorical and universal registers of the human cognitive apparatus and its general functions, which manage its existential situation.³

Putting aside for now the recent interest of scholars of religion in cognitive science (and the theoretical

and methodological difficulties with this approach), it is not clear to me that when one removes the traditional stigma of magic, evidence remains of a coherent set of procedures that one can capture with magic, magism, or magical processes. As I alluded to above, Dubuisson's elaboration of magism and its focus on a core set of ritual elements might lend itself better to a more general theory of human ritual practice. This would be promising, to be sure, since the category of ritual cuts across many distinctions commonly seen as religious, non-religious, and magical—indeed, it might more effectively dissolve the binary of religion and magic. But how does magism add to or lend itself to more middle range categories and classifications in terms of ritual? When, for instance, does a magism ritual become mediated or theorized enough that it becomes some other kind of ritual (either religious or something else)? More to the point, if one removes the negative evaluations, there exist many social, political, material, and ideological differences across the vast reaches of space and time that inflect a group's ritual practices, and which might resist their categorization under one rubric. To insist that one read, say, the Trobriand Islanders or the Azande apart from the negative evaluations of magic that Malinowski or Evans-Pritchard brought (to whatever degree) to their analyses is a task not simply of relabeling the various beliefs and practices once labeled religion and magic with better refined terms but also of reassessing the wider social connections, intersections, and evocations that positioned these as referents of religion and magic in the first place. At a very general level, I don't disagree with Dubuisson that human beings encounter certain existential anxieties in their everyday lives and work to make sense of and mitigate these individually and collectively. Yet clearly identifying these anxieties and their ritual solutions in some original, unmediated, or one-to-one manner is perhaps a vastly overdetermined task. Humans will imagine and respond to the burdens of existence in different ways with productions that are already replete with culturally inflected notions of the social whole and its parts, the past and the present, prosperity and danger, as well as specific conceptions of the human, more-than-human, and less-than-human.

Since Randal Styers' 2004 book *Making Magic* (Styers 2004), not referenced in the present work, I would argue that it has become incumbent on scholars of magic not simply to offer constructive contributions to prior theory on magic (and religion), but also to critically investigate the ideological commitments scholars have in holding the line on the very category

of magic itself, especially in confronting its long legacy of critics. For Styers, the persistence of magic (and its associate religion) as a subject investigated in modern theoretical literature might have as much (or more) to do with the scholarly preoccupations of defining the limits of modernity than it does with "mere intellectual curiosity" (Styers 8). For Styers, magic has often provided a useful "foil" in defining and reinforcing what counts as modern, especially as it has signified the non- or anti-modern set over and against "religion" as a decidedly modern concept. Dubuisson's rehabilitating of magic as magisms shows, in one sense, nuanced sensitivity to the ideological issues pertaining to the category of religion and its modern provenance. However, Dubuisson's postmodern posture toward deconstructing religion ideology ends up rehabilitating magic (as magisms) in terms of a decidedly standard modern trope. His coining of magism essentially restates a familiar view of magic as a tool for setting into relief and criticizing the ideological inoculations of modernity, here, for Dubuisson, executed by its central category of religion and the elite scholars who wield this category as though it generates objective knowledge. On this view, magic represents an imagined recovery of the occluded and oppressed struggles of the non-Western and the non-bourgeois and an interest in the non-commodified realms of human experience; that is, the local and the natural, the practical and perfunctory—unmediated values often regarded as lost or ignored, and to which close attention might tell us something constructive about our collective humanity in our complicated, abstracted, and imperialistic (post)modern world.

Dubuisson has broken up the old religion/magic binary, but in trying to give one of its components a more determinate substance in order to stand alone, he has not escaped the ideological pull that he finds rightly distasteful. To my mind, there is not much promise in scholars continuing to tinker with magic (whether lexically, morphologically, or conceptually). I continue to find very little of substance in magic apart from the situational polemics in which it is used to authorize one group as normative and another as other, deviant, and even dangerous. Letting go of our obsession with religion and magic offers the opportunity to see human social and cultural worlds not only without this binary but also in terms of quite different analytic concepts that emerge from and are keyed to first-order descriptions of forms of cultural alterity that are papered over in uncritical uses of religion and magic.

Reservations aside, and so as not to end on a wholly negative note, Dubuisson is spot on in two

important respects: first, in his assessment that magic and its ideological baggage is still very much impacted in academic disciplines—especially religious studies—and that this is a problem; and second, in his directive that how scholars of religious studies understand magic should be “one of the most passionate problems” (1) and “can allow today for a rethinking of a good part of the vast fresco erected by the history of religions” (3). We differ greatly on how this ought to be done, but not that it should be done.

Endnotes

¹ It is worth noting here the influence and authority of Ernesto de Martino’s (rather dated) *Il mondo magico* (1948), and his notion of *magismo*.

² If space permitted it might be worth exploring in more detail Dubuisson’s own institutional and disciplinary position as a historian of religions in France, itself a largely Catholic country. At least one (European) colleague, upon reading a draft of this review, suggested that he saw Dubuisson’s book as asserting a strongly laïc position.

³ A form of argument recently and meticulously put forth by Jesper Sørensen’s *A Cognitive Theory of Magic* (2007), a text that Dubuisson does not reference. In general, Dubuisson’s bibliography is rather antiquated and is missing some notable recent contributions to theorizing and historicizing magic: e.g. Randal Styers’s *Making Magic* (2004).

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