

BOOK REVIEWS

Madhyamaka and Yogācāra — Allies or Rivals?, edited by Jay L. Garfield and Jan Westerhoff. Oxford University Press, 2015. 300pp. Pb. £23.49. ISBN-13: 9780190231293.

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One of the optional essay questions on the M.A. module I happen to teach reads ‘*Are the philosophies of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools compatible/complementary or incompatible?*’. In one form or another, it is a question that has concerned the minds of many great Buddhist philosophers, as well as having been addressed by outsiders, like Śāṅkara (eighth century) in his *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (II.ii.32), and more recently by modern scholars such as Paul Williams, Ian Harris, Peter Harvey, Janice Willis and Gadjin Nagao. So, apart from the immediate delight felt at seeing the release of this book, the first question that leapt to mind was whether ‘*Allies or Rivals?*’ was equivalent to ‘*compatible/complementary or incompatible?*’. Unravelling this question seemed a fruitful way forward.

Turning first to the book chapters, after the Introduction by Jay L. Garfield and Jan Westerhoff: ch.1 is by Chaisit Suwanvarangkul on, ‘*Pratītyasamutpāda and Dharmadhātu in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism*’; ch.2 by Mattia Salvini on, ‘*Language and Existence in Madhyamaka and Yogācāra: Preliminary Reflections*’; ch.3 by Sonam Thakchöe on, ‘*Reification and Nihilism: The Three-Nature Theory and Its Implications*’; ch.4 by Mark Siderits on, ‘*The Case for Discontinuity*’; ch.5 by Malcolm David Eckel on, ‘*“Undigested Pride”: Bhāviveka on the Dispute between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra*’; ch.6 by Dan Lusthaus on, ‘*Xuanzang and Kuiji on Madhyamaka*’; ch.7 by Jan Westerhoff on, ‘*Nāgārjuna’s Yogācāra*’; ch.8 by Eviatar Shulman on, ‘*Nāgārjuna the Yogācārin? Vasubandhu the Mādhyamika? On the Middle-way between Realism and AntiRealism*’; ch.9 by Jonathan C. Gold on, ‘*Without Karma and Nirvāṇa, Buddhism Is Nihilism: The Yogācāra Contribution to the Doctrine of Emptiness*’; ch.10 by James Blumenthal on, ‘*Two Topics Concerning Consciousness in Śāntarākṣita’s Yogācāra-Madhyamaka Syncretism*’; and ch.11 is Jay L. Garfield’s ‘*I Am a Brain in a Vat (Or Perhaps a Pile of Sticks by the Side of the Road)*’.

The Introduction makes it explicit that the aim of the book is to answer a ‘philosophical question’, to ask whether the schools’ philosophical positions were ‘consistent’ (p. 1). And while the contributors mostly *do* address it as a ‘philosophical’ question, the issues of ‘tone’ or ‘friendliness’ (i.e. social factors) were

also mentioned. Thus, Eckel notes that the ‘rivalry between these two traditions was not friendly’ (p. 136), while Lusthaus contrasts moments of heated dispute with the notion of a shared ‘friendly footing’ (p. 163). And supposing individuals or groups can be considered ‘allies’ if they formally cooperate against a common ‘enemy’, then Lusthaus’ suggestion that Yogācāra and Mādhyamika ‘rival debaters’ may have joined ranks against ‘non-Mahāyāna outsiders’ (p. 147) is also worthy of note. Siderits, for his part, (re)defines ‘rivals’ to mean ‘there cannot be a real synthesis of the core doctrines of the two schools’ (p. 111), which reflects the Introduction’s ‘irreconcilable’ visions (p. 1). Hence the case of ‘allies’, for Siderits, would be tantamount to saying that they were ‘really saying the same thing, only in different words’ (p. 111). In truth, looking back at Chapter 1, that is what Suwanvarangkul seemed to be saying is the case (p. 28). One can only suspect that Siderits would object here to Suwanvarangkul’s use of the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* (it being part of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*) to exemplify the Madhyamaka view (see Siderits’ comment on ‘Indra’s net’ below).

In Chapter 10 it was revealed (by James Blumenthal) that the title of the book was originally proposed as *Yogācāra and Madhyamaka: Complementary or Conflicting Systems?* (p. 243).¹ Thus, it would seem that (some of) the essays herein do in fact tackle the same question of compatibility. As a working definition then, let’s propose that for two systems to be ‘compatible’ they must be able to function together. For them to be ‘complementary’ they must be capable of forming part of a whole system, in a similar vein to what Siderits here calls a ‘workable synthesis’ (p. 111). If neither of these conditions are met, then the systems can be said to be ‘incompatible’, ‘conflicting’ or, as the editors have it, ‘inconsistent’ (p. 10). Siderits suggests that we can speak of ‘discontinuity’ in the event that a synthesis is only possible through ‘subordinating’ one of the systems (p. 111). This seems a little strict in my opinion, more of which later.

So much for the latter half of the question, but what of the schools themselves? Lusthaus warns that both exhibit ‘remarkable diversity across the works of their key authors’ (p. 140). Many of the contributors thus found that they needed to say something about who should be taken as representing the Yogācāra School, the implication being that focusing on different members of the School may result in different answers to the question. Thus Siderits limits himself to ‘early Yogācāra’ (p. 111), while Garfield goes even further, focusing on a single text of Vasubandhu (the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*), one which he believes offers the most charitable ‘phenomenological’ reading of Yogācāra (p. 268).² Similarly, Lusthaus suggests that when for example Dharmapāla attacks Bhāviveka, he is not attacking Madhyamaka *per se* (p. 142). Moreover, when the discussion turned towards Śāntarakṣita, the contributors seemed split on how to interpret his attempt at synthesis. Here Siderits’ proviso about ‘subordination’ becomes particularly relevant. However, some may find this clause rather stretches the meaning of ‘incompatible’ or ‘conflicting’ or ‘rivals’ too far. The Sakyā master, Chogyé Trichen

1. The reviewer found further references indicating that at some point this was the assumed book title. Sadly, it was also discovered that Prof. Blumenthal has passed away since writing this article/chapter: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/saantarak-sita/> ; <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/users/james-blumenthal>

2. In *Empty Words* (2002: Oxford, OUP), Garfield had also felt the need to distinguish between ‘Cittamātra’ and ‘Yogācāra’ (p. 112), terms that are often used interchangeably.

Rinpoche once summarized the path as ‘All things are only mind, and mind itself is illusory’.³ Earlier he had written ‘the knowledge that all is mind is a stepping-stone on the way to complete understanding’ (ibid., p. 159). One is of course reminded of the teachings of Śāntaraksita, and indeed Blumenthal uses the same metaphor of the stepping-stone to describe his work (p. 249). Blumenthal adds that if Śāntaraksita were to be located, he should be placed in the ‘complimentary’ [sic] camp (p. 243). Nevertheless, the editors believe that such hierarchical resolutions may also be read as making the doctrines of the two schools seemingly ‘inconsistent’ (Introduction, p. 8). Here the issue is one of final philosophical positions versus gradual practice, and seems to further limit the scope of the question, and perhaps drives an unnecessary wedge between the schools. The great Nyingma master-commentator, Mipham Rinpoche, on the other hand, called for more unity. Commenting on the *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga*, a text by Asaṅga/Maitreya, he writes:

Since it accords with the Chittamatra in the form its assertions take with respect to the phenomenal world, which constitutes apparent reality, and since it accords with the Madhyamaka in its interpretation of pure being, which constitutes genuine reality, it demonstrates the key points of Mahayana view in a fashion which unites Chittamatra and Madhyamaka.⁴

While Mipham quickly adds ‘its ultimate purpose rests with the Madhyamaka’ (ibid.), it would hardly seem fair to say that he treats the Yogācāra-like section as what our editors have labelled ‘metaphysics for dummies’ (Introduction, p. 8). As Georges Dreyfus pointed out, Mipham ‘minimizes the distance between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra’.⁵ In his response to Śāntaraksita’s *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*, Mipham writes ‘The approach of the Chittamatrins regarding the conventional relative truth is of enormous value. The only tenet of this school to be rejected is that the self-knowing, luminous consciousness is truly existent’.⁶

Dreyfus contrasts Mipham’s inclusivism with Tsongkhapa, who emphasized the ‘distance and incompatibility between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra’ (2003, 328). Having said that, even the current (Gelug) Dalai Lama sees ethical value in the ‘mind-only’ position, and seems to echo Mipham when conceding that ‘From a practical perspective, this view is very useful: it is not hard to see how recognizing that the qualities we perceive in objects are merely aspects of our own mind could have a dramatic impact on reducing our attachment to those external objects’.⁷

While it is wonderful to see all these essays in one place, it should be pointed out that the debate found in this book is not exactly new to modern scholarship, and the debate between unity and incompatibility has been echoed elsewhere. Harvey had once written that both traditions had ‘Buddhahood as their

3. Chogye Trichen, *Parting from the Four Attachments* (2003: New York, Snow Lion, p.167). Cf. *Taking the Result as the Path* (trans. Stearns, 2006: Boston, Wisdom, pp.387–9).

4. Maitreya’s *Distinguishing Phenomena and Pure Being* (trans. Scott, 2004: New York, Snow Lion, p.65).

5. Dreyfus, G. and S. McClintock, *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction* (2003: Boston, Wisdom, p.328).

6. Padmakara Translation Group, *The Adornment of the Middle Way* (2010: Boston, Shambhala, p.100).

7. Dalai Lama, *Essence of the Heart Sutra* (2002: Boston, Wisdom, p.102).

goal' and that they could be seen as 'complementary in their approaches'.⁸ Paul Williams, on the other hand, writes 'There are some contemporary scholars who would want to argue that in the last analysis Yogācāra does not differ in ontology from Madhyamaka. They are just different, and perhaps complementary, ways of getting at the same thing. I completely disagree'.⁹ Williams goes on to list those scholars he takes to be in disagreement with him (*ibid.* p. 264), a list which includes Anacker, Harris and Nagao. Anacker had claimed that the apparent disagreement between members of the two schools may have been because they were 'academics fighting for posts and recognition'.¹⁰ Salvini (Chapter 2) rightly points out that such a comment fails to take into account the 'exemplary accuracy' with which the authors conducted their debates (p. 30). Both Harris and Nagao appear to hold the view that Madhyamaka affirms an 'inexpressible ultimate', a view that Siderits dismisses as the "Indra's net" reading of Madhyamaka (pp. 112–113). A further rejection of Nagao's explicit attempt to synthesize the two systems might base itself on his central notion of 'ascent and descent', and his belief that while Madhyamaka provided the ascent of wisdom, Yogācāra added the descent of compassion.¹¹ This is not the place to go into details, but it might be hoped that my own treatment of the Mādhyamika philosopher, Śāntideva will stand as an alternative reading of these dichotomies, both in the sense of 'ascent/descent' and 'wisdom/compassion' and thus Madhyamaka/Yogācāra ethics.¹² Nevertheless, Nagao's intuition that the uncritical taking of the two schools as being 'mutually antagonistic' is perhaps an 'oversimplification' (Nagao 1991, 219) is indeed a noteworthy contribution to the study of Buddhist philosophy, an insight that every reader of the book under review will no doubt come to appreciate.

So does this new collection of essays bring us any nearer to a final answer to the question of their being complementary or not? The answer, as we might have expected from such a diverse collection of authors, is no. While the reader will no doubt feel more factually informed, the old question of whether to take the Yogācāra as speaking of ontology or of phenomenology remains, while the question of whether to take Asaṅga as an atypical Yogācārin is also present, not to mention the unresolved question of the so-called Maitreya texts. Nevertheless, there are some wise words from Mattia Salvini (Chapter 2) on methodology that might well have been better served as Chapter 1, and the editors' Introduction is a valiant attempt to construct a nuanced overview of the subject. Gratitude goes to Dan Lusthaus (Chapter 6) for introducing us to Kuiji's *Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sūtra*, as this offered a novel perspective on the debate, while a single paragraph by Sonam Thakchöe (p. 73) nicely sums up how both schools may lay claim to avoiding the two extremes of reification and nihilism. It reads:

Where the Yogācārin argues that it avoids the extreme of reification because its [*sic*] rejects even the conventional reality of conceptual nature, the Mādhyamika argues that it avoids the opposite extreme of nihilism by contradicting that position, accepting the conventional reality of conceptual nature. Where the Yogācārin

8. Harvey, P., *An Introduction to Buddhism* (1990: Cambridge, CUP, p.105).

9. Williams, P., *Buddhist Thought* (2000: London, Routledge, p.263 note 25).

10. Anacker, S., *Seven Works of Vasubandhu* (1998: Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, p.3).

11. Nagao, G., *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra* (1991: New York, SUNY, especially pp. 34 and 221).

12. Todd, W., *The Ethics of Śaṅkara and Śāntideva* (2013: Farnham, Ashgate).

argues that its view avoids the extreme of nihilism because it accepts the ultimate reality of dependent and perfect natures, the Mādhyamika argues that it avoids the extreme of reification by denying the ultimate reality of the same.

The book will naturally appeal to those with an interest in Buddhist Philosophy, but also to anybody with a serious interest in the ultimate nature of mind and phenomena.

Needless to say, the more familiar one becomes with primary texts the more one will take from *Allies or Rivals?* and, as such, it is not one of those books that you can simply read and then put on the shelf. Rather, every chapter demands that we go to the primary texts (along with their available commentaries) and decide for ourselves whether these systems were indeed complementary (allies) or incompatible (rivals), whatever these words may mean to you.