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*Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*. Ed. Peggy Morton and Clive Lawton. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996. Pp. 320. ISBN 0-7486-0709-9, £14.95; (paperback), \$24.50.

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This book's comparative approach is both instructive and stimulating. It presents features and aspects of ethical concern as described and prescribed in various religious traditions. Buddhism is one among the six traditions examined; the others being Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All six chapters painstakingly follow the same pattern in explaining the various levels and aspects of ethical issues. This has the advantage of enabling cross-references and providing a synoptic presentation of the religious traditions' responses to abortion or ecological issues, for example. It also carries with it, however, the disadvantage that on several occasions issues have to be focused on which do not originally comprise an aspect or "topic of concern" within certain traditions. This becomes obvious with regard to issues such as homosexuality, marriage, and "sin and sins." Repeatedly, we read that the tradition is remarkably silent and has no writings on this matter (14, 106) or that the ceremony or concept is not really present in the tradition (64, 79, 155). Thus, in various cases questions are asked which are not really those of the traditions themselves. The editors are right, however, to justify their selection in pointing to the fact that such questions (as regards homosexuality or euthanasia) are being addressed to these traditions as they have come to settle in the European and North American context (xii). As follows, the editors explain their selection of themes as "religious identity and authority," "personal and private?," family concerns and various social, political and global aspects of ethical implications. As such, the list is quite comprehensive and I have not found an important theme missing.

The section on Buddhism is written by Peggy Morgan, a senior lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at Westminster College (Oxford) and someone who is active in interfaith dialogue committees. Morgan explains in a clear and understandable way the Buddhist basis of ethics, concentrating on those of the lay Buddhist (the *panca-sīla*, five precepts). It may be disputed whether or not the "Buddhist communities have always had within them a democratic ideal," as proposed by Morgan (58). Also, one may lay emphasis on the hierarchical structure within the monks' and nuns' community and the vertical structure between the community of renunciants (bhikkhu and bhikkhunī) and lay followers (upāsaka and upāsikā), observable in actual life of Southern Buddhism in particular. With regard to the theme of "marriage" Morgan has to admit that "there is no specifically religious marriage ceremony in traditional Buddhist cultures," (64) which points to the stipulation of certain themes. However, Buddhist marriages have been invented in Western countries and Morgan gives two instructive examples stemming from the British scene. One may add an example of a recent case in Austria, the ritual performed being described in detail in

*Ursache und Wirkung* 7/19 (1996/97): 10-13. The chapter goes on to expound Buddhist attitudes toward the use of time and money (leisure, work, wealth, drugs, the media, etc.) and toward the elderly and those in need. The questions of right and wrong are adequately dealt with in explaining Buddhist doctrinal concepts of ignorance (*avijjā*) and “thirst” (*taṇhā*). Likewise, issues of equality and difference between people, religions, races and sexes are laid down. Finally, questions of “war and peace” and global issues such as Buddhist responses to world poverty and population control are discussed. As such, the chapter provides a short, although reliable, and encompassing overview on ethical issues to which present-day Buddhists have to respond. A glossary, bibliography, and some useful addresses in the U.K. and the U.S.A. are attached (to each chapter).

Two minor reservations regarding all chapters shall not go unmentioned: The religious traditions’ internal diversity is more or less not dealt with adequately. Here and there we read of “the Sikhs” or “the Jews,” disregarding the various doctrinal developments and different interpretations of ethical issues, as emphasized by certain schools. Secondly, a slightly idealized picture is repeatedly conveyed, which often is contradicted by actual life and occurrences. It would be great if Buddhist “monks and nuns are living examples of happiness attained by non-attachment to wealth” (71). Counter examples, however, could be quoted in both Asian and Western countries at length. The issue is based on a sometimes too close reliance on authoritative texts which present such pictures. However, these texts impose norms most often, thus being prescriptive rather than being descriptive. It would have been fruitful if the apparent gap between the texts’ norms and their application in actual daily life would have been considered in more elaboration. Nevertheless, the presentation and explanation of ethical issues in six religious traditions are a fruitful and beneficial approach to provide information on topics, increasingly disputed in societal discourse. The book thus can contribute in fostering mutual understanding and an acceptance of difference, desperately needed in today’s multifaith and multicultural societies.