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Reviewed by

N. Robert Glass

Island University, New York

Email: @southampton.luinet.edu

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Postmodernity is about giving up the metaphysical security that guarantees sameness and allowing the radicality of diversity and difference—possibly even irreconcilable difference—to play itself out. Postmodernity is willing to risk presuppositions, foundations, criteria in the name of difference.

—James Buchanan¹

Postmodernism is about difference, but there are different kinds of difference. As Edith Wyschogrod put it,

. . . there are alternative strands of postmodernism. First, there is the tendency in which delay and difference as disruptive of cognitive, axiological, and metaphysical wholeness are stressed. The other thread . . . posits desire as a kind of plenum with nothing to stop its headlong rush other than lines of flight that turn the plenum into its obverse [pure emptiness].²

While the former strand tends to work with and against the limits of the logic of the binary systems of language and thought, the latter focuses on the alternative possibilities offered by instinct, emotion, force and desire.

These two strands of postmodernism allow many combinations within diverse schools of thought, such as Buddhism and Christianity. Robert Magliola's book, plus the five articles in David Loy's edited volume (including one by Magliola), present the reader with a survey of most of these possibilities. Those familiar with postmodern thought, but not with its use in religion, may have difficulty with some of the readings of postmodernism. While in some texts religion has been altered by its engagement with postmodernism (Mark C. Taylor's books *Erring* and *Altarity* come to mind), in these volumes postmodern thought has been altered by its engagement with religion.

The title of the first volume hints at the nature of this engagement: *Healing Deconstruction*. Edited by David Loy, the articles (except for Morny Joy's) were first presented at the Fourth International Buddhist-Christian Dialogue conference held in Boston in 1992. Each approaches the intersection of religion and postmodernism with a different question. David Loy, in his article "Dead Words, Living Words, Healing Words: The Disseminations of Dogen and Eckhart," sees difference as a conceptual issue in thinking and language. He questions whether language can be used in an attempt to go beyond language. While Derrida uses language to expose the binds within language, Loy argues that Dogen and Eckhart have used language to expose and transcend the binds within the self. Religion (as presented here by Dogen

and Eckhart) can take Derrida one step further than he has been willing to go.

While Loy argues for the power of words beyond words, Roger Corless, in “Idolatry and Inherent Existence: The Golden Calf and the Wooden Buddha,” argues for the power of images beyond images—extending to the visual realm the notion that concepts are empty, but we use them anyway. Knowing these images are empty makes the practice postmodern.

Philippa Berry takes a slightly different tack in her article, “Sky-dancing at the Boundaries of Western Thought: Feminist Theory and the Limits of Deconstruction.” Where Corless and Loy work with and against the limits of the binary system of conceptual difference, Berry wonders if there might be an alternate system. She moves from one strand of postmodernism to the other, from the deconstructive work of Derrida to the more constructive work of those such as Kristeva, Deleuze and Braidotti. Borrowing from Nietzsche, Berry asks: Supposing Truth is a woman, what then? If one sees deconstruction in terms of the masculine subject, then ‘woman’ becomes a metaphor for unrealized possibility. The ‘end of man’ opens a new possibility for knowledge.

Perhaps there is a layer of knowledge other than the binary-based system of language and thought: the context in which the binary system exists may not be binary. The logic of the intermediary is not necessarily the logic of identity. (There is a position other than ‘otherness.’) Kristeva’s *chora* may be one such possibility, described from within the binary system as nothingness and emptiness, yet living and existing apart from those terms and perhaps operating under different rules. This distinction may be summarized: deconstruction works with differences in kind and maintains otherness, whereas the other strand of postmodernism works with differences of degree and dissolves otherness but not difference. The *koan* of the latter is this: How to think difference without saying no.

In her article “Mindfulness of Selves: Therapeutic Interventions in a Time of Dissolution,” Morny Joy asks whether the notion of the autonomous self is the main culprit in our time of looming environmental catastrophe, and if so, whether Buddhism can be of some assistance in amending the notion of self. Joy examines the positions of some of the prominent female figures in the field: Joanna Macy, Catherine Keller, Anne Klein and Bell Hooks. David Loy captures the tension in this issue in his introductory comment:

Ecofeminism reveals the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of nature, but has been unable to decide whether gynocentric values are the solution to such domi-

nation or are themselves a construct of patriarchy (p. 7).

Much of Robert Magliola's article, "In No Wise is Healing Holistic: A Deconstructive Alternative to Masao Abe's 'Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyat'" is drawn from his book *On Deconstructing Life-Worlds: Buddhism, Christianity, Culture*. This latter is a major work from an author whose earlier book, *Derrida on the Mend*, was the first to cross Buddhism and deconstruction. Though I disagree with his position on Buddhism and postmodern thought, I do not think Magliola's work has received the attention it deserves. This new volume should help remedy that; it is excellent. Magliola tells us about not only Buddhism, Christianity and deconstruction, but also how he has embodied these three in creative and not-so-creative ways in living his life. It is a fascinating contribution to a genre that might be called "philosophical autobiography." Magliola explains that

all philosophers, even the most 'rationalist,' 'impersonal,' and 'objective,' write from and are written by their life-events, the theatre of their lives, no matter how deeply below the surface such psychic stage-machinery may happen to pull its strings, work its levers. A philosophical autobiography, instead, aims to show the strings and levers (p. xv).

In Magliola's terms, Buddhism and Christianity form a cross: two streams of thought, each pulling in a different direction. The presence of the "other power" of Christianity is forever being undermined by the Buddhist practice of letting go. The two traditions come together to form a space or moment, but it is a negative moment, a state of tension or a gap, which forever undermines the content of the gap, whether it be Buddhism, Christianity, or Magliola's life. For these two streams are "joined"—happily or unhappily—in the body of Robert Magliola. Magliola writes about the consequences of living this tension, and that is his accomplishment. While Magliola's style is overwrought at times, this is a minor quibble in a bold and original work.

Indra's Net offers a way of illustrating the differences between the various positions on religion and the postmodern. As most readers will know, Indra's Net is a classic Buddhist metaphor often associated with Hua Yen Buddhism and, more recently, with any number of groups interested in engaged Buddhism. A net of infinite proportions is hung with a jewel at each of the connecting points. Each jewel reflects and is reflected in all the other jewels, creating a metaphor for interconnectedness. No jewel exists on its own: each is connected to and reflected in all the others.

Some scholars would argue that the metaphor is postmodern as it is. For this group, the postmodern moves from independence to interdependence.

The postmodern insight is coming to understand that the self is not independent but interdependent or relational. Loy and Corless would fall into this group, as would most of the writers cited in Joy's article.

Others see the first group as a little naive and not at all postmodern. They have moved away from independent existence only to rest in mutual existence. However, there is no resting place or mutuality in the endless deferral of deconstruction, and this is the whole point. Whether the place is "words beyond words" or "images beyond images," both are illusions which bar honest acknowledgement of the infinite negation of negation. For Indra's Net to be postmodern, there needs to be a rip or tear in the net.

The distinction between the first and second group is very important. Loy's volume will not be received kindly by those in the second group (I doubt any polite words would be used in a review). "Healing Deconstruction," like "military intelligence," is an oxymoron. Magliola is the odd man out here. Consistent with his metaphor of a cross pulling in two different directions at once, he has a foot in each group. Perhaps similar to the Heidegger of phenomenology and the Heidegger of deconstruction, the tension in his work supports opposed readings.

Those in a third group see the postmodern issue not in terms of language and thought, but in terms of affect and desire. They make another argument: the jewels in Indra's Net should be seen as particles of thought. The real issue is not the relationship between these particles, but the nature of the forces that sustain the particles, for all thinking is embodied. It is not necessary to conclude that the logic of medium in which the jeweled net exists must be the same as that of the jeweled net itself. For this group, difference is not a conceptual problem in thinking and language but an affective problem in instinct, emotion and desire. Deconstruction may rattle the cage, but the cage is left intact. The move from presence to deconstructive difference is not a radical one; it stays within the system it critiques. It is parasitic and cannot live apart from a host. The challenge is to construct and work with an alternate system sustained by a different difference. Berry's essay hints at some of the work being done in this area.

It is appropriate that both these volumes be published by Scholars Press in series sponsored by the American Academy of Religion. Together they illustrate the diverse understanding of postmodernism in the field of religion, and how easily the term can be applied to a wide range of thinkers, concepts and practices.

NOTES

¹“Report on the Seventh East-West Philosophers’ Conference. Justice and Democracy: A Philosophical Exploration.” *Philosophy East and West* 46:3 (July 1996): 311.

² *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago University Press, 1990): 223.