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Amber Carpenter. *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2014. 256 pp. \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84465-298-3.

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Commissioned by Daniel A. Arnold

Amber Carpenter's *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* presents its reader with an engaging account of the philosophical development of Buddhist thought in India, from its origins in approximately the fifth century BCE to about the eighth century CE. As a work in the history of philosophy, the book does not simply articulate and explain what particular Buddhists believed at certain points in their history in India but rather places those ideas in a broader dialectical context in order to help explain how those beliefs developed in response to various philosophical challenges. In this book Carpenter thereby presents Buddhist philosophy *as philosophy* and furthermore encourages the reader to think alongside the philosophers it discusses, to "do philosophy *with* these Buddhists philosophers and their texts" (p. vii). In doing so, the book presents key Buddhist ideas in a manner that neither presupposes familiarity with Buddhist thought nor requires advanced philosophical training.

In presenting a narrative of the development of Buddhist ideas, Carpenter is careful to have all the pieces cohere with each other dialectically. However, because there is less concern to position the views within the broader debates among Buddhist scholars, the nonspecialist reader might get the misleading impression that the narrative offered can be more or less read off the texts discussed and/or that it is generally accepted and uncontentious. The reality is that the historical or textual evidence from that time period in Buddhist history continues to generate a lot of scholarly debate over the interpretation of individual Buddhist texts and the ideas they contain, as well as over the influence of particular thinkers and texts on each other. In light of this, it is not surprising that while the picture Carpenter presents is a compelling one, it is not the only one. It is reflective of a certain interpretive stance that might not be immediately apparent to a reader not familiar with the secondary literature. While the coherence of the account and its foundation in a philosophical engagement with relevant primary texts may give it some support, fully assessing the

plausibility and defensibility of the account, generally or with respect to any particular point along the narrative, would require some work positioning and defending it within the broader scholarly debates concerning the various issues and ideas discussed. This is not something Carpenter has done in this book, no doubt in virtue of having a different kind of audience in mind.

The interpretative lens through which Carpenter reads the development of Buddhist thought is a metaphysical one. In particular she stresses the important role that particular metaphysical and epistemological claims are thought to play in supporting Buddhist ethics, which she characterizes as teleological. This framework then serves as an interpretive lens that significantly influences her interpretation of the problems she reads Buddhists attempting to address in their work and consequently the interpretation of the views presented therein. It is worth noting that the choice of metaphysics as an interpretive linchpin is not one that all Buddhist scholars would agree with, either generally or with respect to a particular tradition, thinker, or idea.

Carpenter begins her book by providing a basic conceptual framework for Buddhist thought. Comparing the early Buddhists with the Ancient Greeks, Carpenter characterizes Buddhist philosophy as oriented around the aim of providing an answer to the basic ethical question, how should I live? Buddhist accounts of metaphysics and epistemology are then explained to be in the service of this broader ethical aim. Buddhist are interested in metaphysics, it is explained, because it is by understanding the relationship between individuals and reality that one can come to give an objective, defensible answer to the question of how to live. "Metaphysics matters," Carpenter explains, and the first step of the Buddhist Eightfold Path, "right view," is thus understood to represent the important metaphysical and epistemological component of a broader ethical (and teleological) project that outlines how to live a good life.

The main obstacle to living a good life is given in the first of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, "the truth of suffering," and chapter 1 focuses particularly on explaining it. Carpenter moves dialectically from understanding suffering as a mere psychological state to understanding it as a deep metaphysical fact. Carpenter makes this metaphysical move by relating suffering to another core Buddhist teaching, that all phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena. On this reading the Buddhist characterization of all experienced phenomena, *saṃsāra*, as suffering can be understood to express a metaphysical fact about them: they are all dependently originated and thus not self-determining. It is this metaphysical fact that underlies the ubiquitous psychological suffering agents experience as the frustration of impotence. Eliminating this psychological suffering is achieved by coming to recognize the fact of suffering (coming to "right view") and by developing ways of living that are in congruence with that fact. Doing this will then ultimately allow one to break out of the chain of dependence altogether and thus eliminate suffering completely.

In chapter 2, Carpenter builds on her discussion of suffering to explain the related key Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*). In this chapter she critically examines various arguments presented in the early Buddhist writings in defense of the no-self view and draws out their metaphysical and practical import. Carpenter stresses that even taken as supporting or constituting a kind of praxis, these arguments have ontological implications. In particular, the employment of what she calls the Chariot Principle in such arguments suggests a reductionist ontology that undermines not only the substantial reality of a self but also the ultimate reality of any composite entity. The Chariot Principle is the principle that "whatever has constituents depends upon those constituents for its existence, and depends upon our conceiving this 'many' as a 'one' for its unity, and so does not ultimately, but only (at best) conventionally, exist" (p. 43). The arguments against the self employing this kind of principle attempt to show that all the various candidates for selfhood lack the simplicity and independence required for ultimate existence, which Carpenter argues amounts to a metaphysical claim about its nonexistence.

Working from various notions of dependence—causal, conceptual, and pragmatic—the Chariot Principle works globally to differentiate two classes of objects: those that are simple and have independent natures, and those that are composites and have dependent natures. This distinction is then used to reinterpret the originally hermeneutic distinction drawn by Buddhists between two kinds of truth. Instead of taking the two truths to distinguish lit-

eral and nonliteral claims in the sutra literature, the distinction is taken to differentiate between two different kinds of reality: the ultimately existing independent simples and the merely conventionally existing dependent composites. Carpenter explains that the *reality* of conventional real entities rests on their ontological dependence on ultimately real entities. Their *conventionality* is a feature of their dependence on the conceptualizing and pragmatic practices of epistemic agents.

In the third chapter, Carpenter addresses the forceful Nietzschean objection that, irrespective of the truth of suffering, elimination of desire is life-denying and not an attractive end. This kind of objection claims that there are other goods that are worth preserving, even at the cost of suffering. Carpenter examines several alternatives and argues briefly that these can be incorporated into the Buddhists teleology or are to be rejected on metaphysical grounds. However, she spends most of the chapter using this objection to set up a discussion of the underlying teleological structure she takes Buddhist ethics to have.

Unlike Greek eudaemonist ethics, the Buddhists' "revisionist" version is an impersonal one that does not rely on a teleological conception of reality. If Buddhist metaphysics is reductionist in the way outlined in chapter 2, then no conventional entities (including persons) can have a real nature or form that could determine a norm of excellence for that thing. In fact, identifying and taking as normative the natures of such conventional entities is precisely the source of suffering, according to the Buddhists. Thus Carpenter explains that for the Buddhists, "instead of trying to become the best thing of our kind, we are trying to become quite unlike the kind of thing we are" (p. 56). However, while the underlying metaphysics may not be teleological in the usual way, it is still taken by Carpenter to provide an important normative constraint for deciding which actions and attitudes are good (*kuśala*) or bad (*akuśala*). Because suffering is a metaphysical fact, certain attitudes and behavior that do not reflect that fact are not going to be valuable teleologically. It is for this reason that Carpenter dismisses attempts to understand *kuśala* and *akuśala* in more phenomenological or psychological terms.

In chapter 4, Carpenter moves from a discussion of the ideas presented in the earliest strata of Buddhist literature into the later developments of Buddhist thought by Ābhidharmika and Mahāyāna Buddhists. In this chapter she is particularly interested to contrast the views of the Mādhyamika Nāgārjuna with those of the Abhidharma tradition. The main point of contention between these

two approaches is characterized by Carpenter as metaphysical. The Abhidharma thinkers follow the reductionist approach discussed in chapter 2, seeking to clarify the nature of the ultimately existing simples, called *dharma*s, and explaining the process towards enlightenment with respect to them. Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, argues against the Abhidharma that all phenomena, including *dharma*s, are empty (*śūnya*), which is to say that they lack the kind of inherent and independent existence (*svabhāva*) that the Ābhidharmikas take to be the mark of their ultimate reality.

This conclusion sets up the presentation of one of the central concerns that will drive the dialectic in the subsequent chapters: the concern that the doctrine of emptiness entails metaphysical and moral nihilism. If all phenomena are empty and thus conventional, then there is no ultimate reality to serve as the foundation to support the accuracy of the distinctions we draw between true and false, real and unreal, and right and wrong. The asymmetrical dependence of the conventional on the ultimate presented in chapter 2 is collapsed in a way that seems to threaten the whole Buddhist project.

Chapter 5 addresses the issue of karma and its place in Buddhism. In particular Carpenter addresses the following concerns: that karma is inconsistent with a no-self view, that it actually gives one reason to posit a self, that it cannot support moral attitudes, that it is unnecessary for the Buddhist project, and that it is implausible given its association with the unsupported doctrine of rebirth. In the course of addressing these concerns, Carpenter characterizes karma as primarily the mental action of intending, understood to include not only formulating a purpose to act but also in the sense of perceiving one's environment, in light of one's desires, as affording certain opportunities for action. Karma as a moral notion then places the locus of moral evaluation on these actions of intending. In keeping with the teleological and metaphysical account given thus far, Carpenter then explains that "what makes an intention right is that it is the appropriate attitude towards the correct objects under the right circumstance" (p. 101). "Appropriate" here is understood in terms of accuracy—seeing objects as they in fact are—and in terms of the consequences such intentions have on the progression towards the end of eliminating suffering. Since it is in terms of karma that moral responsibility is understood, as well as the means by which moral development is explained, Carpenter takes karma to be central to understanding the Buddhist project.

Contrasting the views of the Buddhists with the non-Buddhist philosophers of the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika tradi-

tions is the subject of chapter 6. The focus of the chapter is on examining certain arguments given in support of the existence of a substantial self, and various replies that the Buddhist give. Carpenter considers several Nyāya arguments that maintain that we cannot account for our experience of ourselves as agents—moral or epistemic—without positing a substantial self. The answers the Buddhists give to these kind of arguments rely heavily on the notion of causal continuity. By reversing the order of explanatory priority, Carpenter explains, the Buddhist can argue that the phenomena associated with personhood are not explained by there being a substantially existing person to unify distinct experiences. Rather, the positing of personhood is itself explained by the perceived causal continuity between those experiences. The limited success this kind of response can have in answering all of the Nyāya concerns is noted by Carpenter towards the end of chapter 6 and helps to set up the discussion in chapter 7 of Yogācāra Buddhism, which is characterized by Carpenter to be in part attempting to provide a better response to this challenge.

In chapter 7 Carpenter characterizes the Yogācāra as being concerned with primarily two things: (1) defending the ontological claim that mind-independent objects do not exist, and (2) retaining a distinction between conventional and ultimate reality by positing an ultimate reality that stands behind ordinary conventional experience. In explaining this first concern, Carpenter goes through the arguments made by Vasubandhu in the *Twenty Verses* that aim to show that positing mind-independent reality is unnecessary to explain experience; that talk of external objects is just a pragmatic way of talking; and that the hypothesis that explains experience in terms of mind-independent objects is incoherent. She then goes on to contextualize these arguments by relating them to the broader Yogācāra view as it is presented in Vasubandhu's *Thirty Verses* and the *Treatise on the Three Natures*. Carpenter presents these two texts as addressing the second concern noted above by explaining reality in terms of three natures, one of which retains the metaphysical ultimacy that Madhyamaka rejects. In giving this account of the *Thirty Verses* and the *Treatise on the Three Natures*, Carpenter reads the Yogācāra as being sensitive to the concerns about nihilism that arise for their Mādhyamika co-religionists. Since this problem arises because of the collapse of the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality, Carpenter reads the Yogācāra as responding by reintroducing a notion of ultimate reality that they maintain is consistent with the general Mahāyāna claim that all phenomena are empty. Positing this ultimate reality not only allows the Yogācāra to retain a distinction

between ultimate and conventional reality and thus preserve a sense in which the conventional is grounded in the ultimate, it also provides resources to address some of the concerns of the Naiyāyikas.

Chapter 8 develops the issues raised in the previous chapter by exploring how they are addressed by the epistemological tradition that arose in India in the sixth and seventh centuries. Carpenter characterizes the shift to epistemology as a response to the growing pan-Indian need to establish grounds for adjudicating between rival metaphysical theories. Drawing strong parallels with the Yogācāra, Carpenter likens the ineffable objects of perception posited by the Buddhist epistemologists Dignāga and Dharmakīrti to the Yogācāra ultimate reality. In drawing this connection Carpenter seeks to show how it is that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti attempt to ground their account of knowledge in ultimate reality and thus retain the asymmetrical dependence of the conventional on the ultimate perceived necessary to avoid metaphysical and moral nihilism. The problems associated with foundational attempts to ground the conceptual in the nonconceptual are given voice by Mādhyamika critics, in particular Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva. Carpenter notes, however, that these philosophers still encounter the problem of explaining how Madhyamaka avoids the pitfalls of nihilism.

Carpenter concludes the book with an epilogue that mainly sketches out how the concerns about metaphysics

that have been the focus of the narrative thus far come to a head in the attempt by Śāntarakṣita to synthesize the Yogācāra views of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti with Madhyamaka. While the deconstructive analysis of the Madhyamaka seems to get something right about the nature of conventional experience, the need for a metaphysical grounding for their teleological ethics pushes the position back towards the Yogācāra view. Thus it is not surprising to find thinkers such as Śāntarakṣita attempting to synthesize the views in order to save Buddhism from nihilism and defend the Buddhist way of life against its rivals.

Indian Buddhist Philosophy provides an accessible introduction to Buddhist philosophy that helpfully places the various views defended in a broader intellectual and dialectical context. This way of approaching the material would be particularly helpful for teaching Buddhist philosophy to undergraduates insofar as it introduces the main ideas while at the same time modeling the kind of engagement with primary texts that philosophy instructors often desire from their students. However, its readers should keep in mind that the dialectical narrative presented is strongly influenced by a contentious emphasis on metaphysics as the primary philosophical concern for Buddhists in the development of their thought. In light of this, the book is probably best appreciated alongside supplementary accounts of the issues and history discussed therein.

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