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Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities, by Robert G. Morrison

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sion "closes deconstruction off from mindless charges of nihilism and subjectivism" even as it "closes religion off from mindless fundamentalism" (p. 279). Anyone today who would persist in claiming that Derrida has no significance for religion—or religion for Derrida—can do so only by ignoring this complex, provocative, and masterful work.

THOMAS A. CARLSON, *University of California, Santa Barbara.*

MORRISON, ROBERT G. *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 250 pp. $62.00 (cloth).

Any mention of Nietzsche necessarily raises the question of which Nietzsche one has in mind. In recent years, French deconstructionists have awarded him posthumous admission to the *Academie Française.* Jaspers and then Kaufmann taught an earlier generation to think of him as a prophet of existentialism. Robert Morrison has made Nietzsche recognizable once again as a German Romantic. More precisely, Morrison presents Nietzsche as a kind of romantic guru: a teacher interested in spiritual practice. Curiously, Morrison's return to Nietzsche's romanticism is made possible by rereading him using Pali Buddhist thought. Morrison's reading of Nietzsche is all the more intriguing when we note that Nietzsche himself not only predicted the West's current interest in Buddhism, but he was ready with a harsh dismissal of it. With the death of God, a weakened and degraded bourgeoisie will be attracted to Buddhism's nihilism and passivity. Western dalliance with Buddhism should be seen as a symptom of a cultural disease. For Nietzsche, Buddhism's nihilism and passivity must be overcome by means of the will to power.

In Morrison's view, Nietzsche was wrong about Buddhism as a form of passive nihilism. In fact, Buddhism and Nietzsche bear "ironic affinities" with one another. To highlight these affinities, Morrison provides his readers with close textual comparisons bringing together a multitude of Nietzsche's works with texts taken from the Pali Buddhist canon. Morrison's attention is focused almost exclusively on the correspondences between Nietzsche's ideas regarding will to power and self-overcoming (*Selbstüberwindung*) and the Buddhist notions of desire (*tanha*) and mind cultivation (*citta-bhâvanâ*).

In a godless universe, a world without any transcendent basis for values, new values must be established through the assertion of will. Nietzsche's notion of will, in Morrison's reading, is similar to early Buddhist teachings regarding the transformation of *tanha.* Rightly understood, the goal of Buddhist spiritual practice is not to annihilate desire. Buddhism seeks the transformation of desire from egocentric clinging to compassionate action. *Tanha* can thus be either skillful or unskillful. This distinction is central to Morrison's retrieval of Nietzsche. Like *tanha,* will to power can also be either skillful or unskillful. Skillful will to power leads to self-overcoming and the rise of the *Übermensch.* Morrison also finds affinities between Nietzsche's demand for self-overcoming (*Selbstüberwindung*) and Pali Buddhism's notion of mind cultivation (*citta-bhâvanâ*). For both Pali Buddhism and Nietzsche, the human being is a welter of conflicting wills struggling for supremacy. The *Übermensch* arises in the establishment of a higher quantum of power by means of the overcoming of lower drives. Morrison makes connections with Pali Buddhist traditions regarding the cultivation of mind through spiritual practice.

Morrison's is not the first effort at comparing Buddhism to Nietzsche. The

relationship between the two, however, can vary considerably depending on what side of the Pacific one is working from. Japanese interpreters of Nietzsche and Buddhism, such as Nishitani Keiji, in his *The Self Overcoming Nihilism* (Albany, N.Y., 1990), and Abe Masao in his various essays on Nietzsche, offer their own critiques of the West. If Nietzsche thought of Buddhism as symptomatic of the disease of nihilism, these Japanese thinkers return the compliment in kind, only now Nietzsche is symptomatic of the disease and Buddhism is held up as the cure. Contrary to Nishitani and Abe, Morrison would make of Nietzsche a latter-day practitioner of the Dharma by reading Buddhism as a kind of Nietzschean call to will to power. Morrison ends several of his later chapters with the observation that Nietzsche, had he the benefit of a more critical understanding of early Buddhism, could have learned much from its practical experience in spiritual practice. The book even concludes with the suggestion that we might think of the historical Buddha as a kind of *Übermensch*.

Did Siddhartha Gautama really preach a form of the will to power? One of Morrison's many virtues is that he does not ask his readers to accept this conclusion without benefit of a carefully argued and critical treatment of the texts in question. He also provides an evaluation of the materials on Buddhism available to Nietzsche, even speculation on the import of Oldenberg's mistranslations of early Pali texts. An affinity, no matter how ironic, does not a difference make. The affinities Morrison traces between Nietzsche and Pali Buddhism allow him to read both Nietzsche and Buddhism in unusual ways. The same, I believe, can be said for the differences that distinguish the two. If will to power can be construed as a form of skillful desire (*tanha*), should not compassion (*karuna*) be recognized as a Buddhist form of *ressentiment?* Should this prove to be the case, the historical Buddha would be a far cry from Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.

JAMES L. FREDERICKS, *Loyola Marymount University.*

FENN, RICHARD K. *The Persistence of Purgatory.* New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. viii+209 pp. $49.95 (cloth); $16.95 (paper).

The doctrine of purgatory is one of those wonderful excrescences of the Christian imagination. It has only the slimmest authorization in scripture, but it is a story the very absence of which hollered out its need to be told in some form of midrash. Origen speculated about it, the thirteenth-century Council of Lyons established it as doctrine, Dante conjured it into an enduring alpine geography of the soul, and the Council of Trent reaffirmed it in the face of its Protestant detractors. Richard Fenn has written a book that is not about any of these wondrous details but is every bit as good. Instead, he wants to know what became of purgatory as Western societies relinquished it. His argument is that purgatory persists in our conception of time and has, through moralizing our temporal consciousness, given rise to the modern notion of the self.

In its classic form purgatory was, first, an ordeal that transpired in the afterlife, a realm that shared the same "time zone" as life on earth. Sins were measurable there in terms of time—each sin had units of time corresponding to it. Second, purgatory was a way of describing transactions between the living and the dead. The living had obligations to the dead to say prayers and make offerings on their behalf in order to ease their torments and to relieve them of time they had ahead of them in purgatory. Third, time was itself counting down to an end. At the end