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## BOOK-REVIEWS

### I

Griffiths, Paul; *On Being Mindless : Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem*; La Salle, Illinois : Open Court Publishing Co., 1986; xxii + 220 pp.

This book deals with an important consequence of advanced meditational self-culture as admitted in several traditions within the Buddhist religion, namely, the "attainment of cessation" (*nirodhasamāpatti*), and is offered as a "case study in the relationship between philosophical theory and soteriological practice in Indian Buddhism." Griffiths considers *nirodhasamāpatti* as an altered state of consciousness, and the overall aim of his inquiry is to elucidate the distinctive terms in which it was "described, recommended, analysed and discussed" in the Theravāda, Vaibhāsika, and Yogācāra traditions (Sautrāntika positions also receive some consideration, albeit in a less details fashion). *On Being Mindless* is not only addressed to "Buddhologists, those who are professionally concerned with the history of Buddhist thought and practice", but also to two other types of reader — those engaged in the study of the mind-body problem as it figures in Western traditions and students of the history of religion. Reflecting the title, the most distinctive task the book as a whole seeks to accomplish, however, is to increase critical understanding of the way "in which the relationship between the physical and the mental was conceived in early Indian Buddhism". As will be indicated in the sequel, there is

room to criticize some of Griffiths' approaches and conclusions in this book. Still, the inquiry it presents — which subjects a highly recondite inner detail in Buddhist meditational practice to close intellectual scrutiny in an innovatively comparativist framework — contains much that merit both philosophical and larger scholarly attention. *On Being Mindless* helps to highlight the existence of technically argued philosophical standpoints within the Buddhist textual corpus in a spirit that is sensitive to some of the concerns of cross-cultural philosophizing; and this, to be sure, is significant, given the reluctance on the part of certain noted European exponents of Indian Buddhism (as Griffiths himself indicates at the outset), to even acknowledge any semblance of a philosophical drift in Buddhist writings.

The exposition in this short work (organized in four chapters, followed by a glossary and three appendices incorporating relevant textual material and translations) is engagingly complex. Both Pāli Nikāya texts and ancillary commentarial literature (of Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla) are identified here as some of the prime sources for Theravāda articulations on *nirodhasamāpatti*. Griffiths considers the latter to be represented in these contexts as a condition without mental events, distinguished from death itself "only by a certain residual warmth and vitality in the unconscious practitioner's body", *Nirodhasamāpatti* as admitted in the Theravāda tradition was of course attained through specialized meditational techniques. In Griffiths' inquiry two such techniques, "cultivation of insight" (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) and the "cultivation of tranquility" (*samathā-bhāvanā*) are emphasized and examined and they are interpreted as being respectively, "analytic" and "enstatic" on phenomenological grounds. However, he does not regard Theravāda stances on the mind-body interactions that arise from this tradition's explanations surrounding *nirodhasamāpatti* persuasive (though he

concedes that they are illuminating in several ways, offering above all, evidence of philosophical positions implicit in Buddhist soteriological discussion. In particular, the emergence of consciousness from the state of "cessation" as expounded in classic texts is held to generate intricate conceptual complications. The philosophical difficulties that come to the fore at this and other levels, according to Griffiths, are for the most part traceable to the "Theravāda tendency towards a profound dualism in regard to mental and physical events, a dualism which perceives these as different in kind, capable of interection of various kinds but not of acting as direct efficient causes of one another". Griffiths identifies the commitment to strict impermanence and the need to account for continuity (both of the mind, and again across lives, given belief in rebirth) as another source of problems and dilemmas. All of them, in his view, remain unresolved because of "philosophical pressures without and hermeneutical pressures within" the Theravāda tradition.

The Vaibhāsika tradition's explanations on "cessation" (which are identified as being located in several sources within its textual corpus, though Griffiths' focus falls mostly on the *Abhidharmakośa* and its commentaries), are likewise held to have been developed under certain constraints. These, it is held, are fidelity to tradition (even, Griffiths argues, when some elements in it were no longer understood, persuasive or significant), and the general Vaibhāsika commitment to "create a system" to "account for everything". He in fact regards this tradition's interpretation of "cessation" (which was treated as a *dharma*) and the emergence of consciousness from that state (accounted for in terms of the *samanantarapratyaya* conception of causality) to exemplify "intellectual acrobatics", and does not find them "entirely satisfactory, even in terms of the intellectual system

within which it operates". The Sautrāntika position on these matters (woven around the central idea that mind and body "mutually seed one another") is identified as providing yet another philosophically interesting variant interpretation : yet this, according to Griffiths, tends to entail the suggestion that "there really are mental events in the attainment of cessation; even if they are mental events which are, in some undefined sense, inactive or unmanifest".

The texts Asaṅga and Vasubandhu are the sources for the study of the Yogācāra tradition which sought to interpret the universe in uniquely mentalistic terms. Understandably enough, Yogācāra stances on the book's central theme are clarified against the background of this tradition's key philosophical emphases woven around the notion of *ālaya-vijñāna* ("store-consciousness"). The inner details of the Yogācāra explanations concerning "cessation" (which are shown to interface on occasion with the positions taken in the other traditions), are finally located within the intricate interpretations given to the above notion. In fact Griffiths takes the view that "one of the main reasons which prompted the Yogācāra theorists to devote so much intellectual energy to the question of the store-consciousness was just this need to account for entrance into and emergence from the attainment of cessation".

Griffiths turns to evaluate Buddhist standpoints on the mind-body problem in the light of the above accountings of the *nirodhasamāpatti* in the book's final chapter. Despite its terseness (this chapter is just under seven pages), the discussion here projects some philosophically interesting conclusions which are especially noteworthy. There are, in his view, pan-Buddhist acceptances as regards the approaches to this problem : avoiding substantialist differentiations such as are ingrained in Cartesian thought, for instance, all Buddhist traditions saw the mind-body

connections as causal relationships that obtained "between sets of transitory events", and this, he rightly insists, was even true of the Yogācāras (who refused to admit an ontological distinction between the mental and physical). But considering other underpinnings of Buddhist reflectivity in this sphere (such as the separation of the physical and the mental and the avoidance of reductionism), the overall Buddhist stance on the mind-body connection is characterized as "a non-substantivist event-based interactionist psycho-physical dualism". Though he is mindful of the limitations of the various Buddhist explanations of the "attainment of cessation" he has highlighted, Griffiths does not dispute the internal coherence and consistency of Buddhist philosophical contributions to the study of mind-body interrelations. What he does question, rather, is something else—their sufficiency to deal with "certain observable phenomena". And significantly, this circumstance, it appears, is ultimately traced to the Buddhist commitment to exclude substance-metaphysics altogether.

This book succeeds notably in establishing through its study of *nirodhasamāpatti* that Buddhist soteriological discussions do encompass philosophical standpoints which merit recognition as contributions to the debate on the mind-body problem. However, the criticisms Griffiths advances against these standpoints, it is well to remark, are not entirely unanswerable. Admission of a mental substance might help overcome some of the difficulties highlighted, but they also generate still others to which experientially grounded epistemologies in particular have long been sensitive. Put baldly, the issue to be confronted here is this: on what basis can one admit such a substance? Clearly, Buddhism's exclusion of it, it must be recognized, was based on findings both introspectual and meditational. Besides, there is room to argue that many of the complications in textual

articulations on *nirodhasamāpatti* which Griffiths highlights might after all be more cogently clarified within a conceptual framework fashioned around an explicit recognition of the insights that twentieth century analytic and linguistic philosophers—Wisdom; Ryle, Strawson, Malcolm and others — have generated in their contributions to philosophy of mind in particular. Indeed, the failure to draw their insights into a critical inquiry which deals with so many intricate issues that fall within the purview of this latter field of study could even be viewed as a methodological shortcoming, especially by comparativists who are conscious of the deeper possibilities of East–West philosophical dialogue. But the book’s exposition appears, in case, to encompass other questionable features of a more basic nature. To those who view the meditational background to Buddhism’s soteriological teachings with even a modicum of empathy, *nirodhasamāpatti* itself will no doubt represent a unique manifestation of beatific ataraxia, prefiguring a state of nirvāṇic release, free of the trammels of mundane existence. The possibility of conceptually entertaining such an altered and elevated state of consciousness, it is well to observe, seems to well-nigh exist even within certain secular frames of philosophy: the perspectives of evolutionary epistemology (which, among other things, allow full scope for “imageless thoughts—thoughts that occur without any sensory or imaginal content”, cf. W. W. Bartley, III, “Philosophy of Biology versus Philosophy of Physics”, ed. by G. Radnitzky and W. W. Bartley, III, in *Evolutionary Epistemology, Rationality and Sociology of Knowledge*, La Salle Ill. : 1987, pp. 15, 26) are perhaps especially noteworthy in this connection. Yet, in Griffiths investigation, significantly, *nirodhasamāpatti* tends to be regarded in the narrowest terms of physicalistic reductionism: he finds a “model” for interpreting the physical status of one who has “attained cessation” in the condition of a “mammal in the deepest stages of hibernation”,

and as for such a person's mind, he identifies an analogy for that in cataleptic trance states — “ the kind of condition manifested by some psychotic patients and long-term coma patients ”. Few readers, I think, will take this as a philosophically edifying interpretative stance. Finally, Griffiths investigation as a whole is also susceptible to a general objection of a mainly religious character. Viewed from the angle of Buddhist spirituality, the propriety of studying the nature and implications of a unique, inner religious experience wholly from outside—in this instance on the basis of a mere examination of certain textual elaborations on it, even though this is backed by the application of considerable linguistic and exegetical skills—does remain open to question. Committed Buddhists can fairly argue that though explanations dealing with *nirodhasamāpatti* are amenable to intellectual study, their full scope has to be finally understood in a context of meditational concentration rooted in spiritual self-culture. Whether the presumption implicit here—that commentators on matters meditational must also be adepts in meditation—is practically realizeable in the world of secular learning is of course highly debatable. Still, as one admires the technically useful discussions in *On Being Mindless* it is well to point out that a case can indeed be made for some appreciative understanding of Buddhist meditation even in purely textual-philosophical studies of classic elaborations of the consequences of such meditations. It is indeed a matter for some regret that this notable work is not grounded on such an appreciative understanding.

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## II

R. SUNDARA RAJAN, *Innovative Competence and Social Change*,

Indian Philosophical Quarterly Publication No. 10  
(Pune, 1968), pp. 130, Rs. 25/-

*Towards a Critique of Cultural Reason*, OUP,  
(New Delhi, 1987), pp. 144 incl. Index; £ 5.95.

Sundara Rajan is perhaps the first Indian Philosopher who has been attempting to be deeply sensitive to the nuances of culture and politics in the South Asian Sub-continent. His astute scholarship has tried to link and operationalise the abstract notions of theory into possible implementable policies for national integration. Thus, the two works are a prelude to the third in print *The Primacy of the Political: Towards a Theory of National Integration*. For over a decade Sundara Rajan has grown to believe and work out the framework of analysis in the field of social philosophy and concern for the operation of the political domain.

It is often the practice of the reviewers to review a book/books from the perspective of its presentation, purity of discipline and to identify newer methodologies adopted by the author to indicate fresh evidence of interpretation. Thus to state that *Innovative Competence and Social Change* is written to raise certain meta-philosophical issues by a 'detailed application of the paradigm of the four causes to the domain of philosophical reasoning' on the one hand and the linkage with a philosophical frame work to create a 'theory of innovative competence' on the other would be merely traditional in approach. Similarly to state that *Towards a Critique of Cultural Reason* indicates Sundara Rajan's attempt to move from a Marxian view point to a deeper commitment to Kant and his central notion of 'What is Man,' will

result for the reviewer to be engrossed in the details of technicalities relating to understanding of meaning, contextuality, functions of exemplars on one side and the study of the inter-relationship between meaning and action on the other side. Rather the canvas over which Sundara Rajan paints is vast and scholarship displayed in the discussion which connects Kant's notion of aesthetic idea with Ricoeur's perspective on speech and textual discourses are indeed original. Thus to be universal in such nuances and enjoy the intellectual organistic heights would be to relegate Sundara Rajan's real contribution in the field of applied Philosophy to identify the real cause of his inquiry which has far reaching consequences in the area of development and developmental strategy which incorporates not merely the socio-economic aspects around man but the far more complex issues of culture and politics. Unwittingly Sundara Rajan provides a wonderful mosaic of culture in politics transcending into politics in culture and thereby making the work closer to the domain to compare established notions of Western Philosophy with the ancient Indian philosophical work of Arthashastra in the third work to come i. e. *Primacy of the Political : Towards a Theory of National Integration*, which analyses that political problems as a "search for a legitimate authority" with the aim to protect "the social order and the arts of life." He identifies two contextual problems (a) the autonomy of the new nation-states in the context of encroaching dominance; and (b) the internal integrity of the state *vis-a-vis* various groupings and ethnic pressures and pulls.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Sundara Rajan brings out his real intentions to articulate politics in culture through a sophistication by which both the students of moral philosophy on the one hand and the practitioners of policy formulation on the other would find equal joy to digest the complex themes of the Kantian notion of Critique, Husserl's reflections on life-world, Dilthey's articulations of

Hermeneutics of Historical Reason, Ricoeur's perspective on speech and textual discourse or Noam Chomsky's logic of languages on the one hand and the vicissitudes of Kautilyan deliberations towards administering of statecraft by the monarch with rules to acquire, preserve, develop and provide social justice to achieve the right blend of nationalism leading to national integration on the other.

Frankly speaking, the articulation of such technical texts in a single sweep of the painting brush of Sundara Rajan will often lead even a serious reader to utter dismay for there is no single theme on which Sundara Rajan stops to articulate at any one single moment. His scholarship does not only sweep in a multidisciplinary parameter but also builds the intradisciplinary linkages with philosophical abstruseness built around the maxim that an intellectual need not be apologetic towards his articulation and only those should read or digest who possess the capability to do so. Sundara Rajan is right as well as wrong at the same time. Right in the sense that his work is ideal for judgement in posterity, wrong in the sense that the intellectual capacity of those who matter to incorporate his ideas into practice at least in South Asia are below the levels of mediocrity to understand or less even to take cognizance of the wealth of truth present in Sundara Rajan's work. This latter part has been the cause of misery even to great masters like Socrates and we hope Sundara Rajan also does not believe to be part of historical repetition by remaining like a pure piece of perfect diamond more to be used to enhance the beauty of a crown rather than being used as an industrial tool for nation building process.

The world of today is fast changing both in the form of governance and linkages between nation states to develop new notions and definitions of ideologies to determine new parame-

ters of power structure aimed once again towards Balance of Power rationale. Ideologies are no longer confrontational which hence opposes what has been articulated by Sundara Rajan. Tolerance is not only a methodological norm for Philosophy but also of ideology. What Sundara Rajan claims in terms of contestability in Philosophy implying availability of alternatives and respect for them leading to the notion of tolerance has emerged in the revised Marxist maxim of Glasnost and Perestroika. Nowhere is self reflexivity more profound than in political ideologies foreshadowing the 21st century. Serious students of Politics and Philosophy have to be extremely cautious to understand the vicissitudes as well as the convergences emerging to encompass the nuances of strategic Thinking and the philosophical dimensions incorporating developmental strategies if new notions striving to reinterpret perhaps the thematic forms in Kant, Marx or Wittgenstein so ably vitalised by Sundara Rajan.

Over a decade and a half back sitting as a graduate student in Charles Taylor's course on Hegel, I made the remark that notion of justice for Hegel was nothing more than '*good will*'. I need not incorporate what Professor Taylor did to me for the next three days in his class for the sacrilege committed. I learnt my lessons then and I incorporate them today. Sundara Rajan's work of the past nine years cannot be similarly notional. It has a deep commitment to society at large. A philosopher who does dare to articulate the unmanageable without being unconventional. The world of Philosophy in India and in the sub-continent is richer by Sundara Rajan's contribution and we hope to see much more of his abstruseness in print than simple populist articulations which are merely meant for mass consumption. The books reviewed are, thus, an important addition to the growth of

knowledge not only in the domain of Philosophy but also for the students of Public Policy and Administration.

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1. R. Sundara Rajan, "Primacy of the Political : Towards a Theory of National Integration" in *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. V, No. 1 (Sept.-Dec. 1987), p. 136.

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