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Double Exposure: Cutting Across Buddhist and Western Discourses

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Book Reviews

basically through self-alteration. These characterizations seem to overlook James's theism in *Pragmatism* and his rejection of personal autonomy in the "Conclusions" of *A Pluralistic Universe*. Ward tends to reduce the thought of James to the psychohistory of James, even while he objects when James ostensibly reduces religion to the psychohistory of the believer.

This book, while certainly valuable, misses its chance to be a landmark study because its prose is too often muddy and its ideas are too often undeveloped. Entire sections sometimes are very hard to follow, sometimes presuppose too much for the uninitiated, sometimes include too much for the initiated. Audacious generalizations are offered on one page, only to be qualified on later pages. The book's high price seems better explained by the publisher's effort to make an offer university acquisitions librarians cannot refuse than an offer students and scholars can afford.

Nevertheless, this book justifies its existence, not least by its original demonstration in chapter 5 that a sense of spiritual absence lies at the heart of each of the classical pragmatists. Rather than impose on Peirce, James, and Dewey our own suspicions of all things theological, Ward adroitly sets them in their own turn-of-the-century religious milieu. One can hope that this historical sensitivity will encourage today's neopragmatists to exercise greater theological intelligence.

WILLIAM D. DEAN, *Iliff School of Theology*.

FAURE, BERNARD. *Double Exposure: Cutting across Buddhist and Western Discourses*.

Translated by Janet Lloyd. *Cultural Memory in the Present*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004. xiv+195 pp. \$49.50 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).

Over the past fifteen years, Bernard Faure has shaken up the study of Chan/Zen Buddhism as few others have. Applying his considerable wit and erudition, an overall critical perspective steeped in French postmodernism, and a particular sensitivity to issues of gender and social power, he has generated a revisionist view of Chan as a movement that is fundamentally duplicitous, utilizing a rhetoric opposed to philosophy, fantasy, structure, and ritual, while in fact being deeply implicated in all of these.

This duplicity is found in many religious traditions, especially those with mystical overtones. In Chan, or Mahayana Buddhism more generally, there is an explicit theoretical underpinning for the mixture of apophatic rhetoric with cataphatic practice: the concept of Twofold Truth, ultimate and conventional, or, in Faure's terms, logical and existential—with the former usually expressed negatively (as emptiness, nonduality, etc.), the latter positively (in terms of causation, morality, ritual, etc.), and the two seen as noncontradictory. The Twofold Truth has enabled Mahayana traditions like Chan to maintain an open (some might say ambiguous) conception of truth and reality and to operate effectively as complex systems within the cultural and political "real" world. It is Faure's purpose in *Double Exposure* to bring the notion of Twofold Truth to bear on Western thought—though he also is concerned to reflect the concept back upon Buddhism itself.

Faure goes about this through a series of loosely connected chapters that explore such topics as Orientalist and modernist distortions of the nature of Buddhism; the rigidity of the concept of truth in most Western philosophy; the multiplicity of Chinese religious traditions; the philosophical perspectives of the

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major Buddhist schools of India and China; the basic (“transcendental”) concepts of Buddhism and the issues they raise; the advantages and ambiguities of the notion of Twofold Truth; and the Buddhist attitude toward the “conventions” of sex, dreams, myth, ritual, and language. Along the way, Faure draws on numerous important Asian thinkers (e.g., Nāgārjuna and various Chan/Zen masters) and a multitude of Westerners, ranging from classic philosophers, to modern poets and mystics, to postmodern theorists (many of them French).

At the heart of Faure’s argument is an attempt to articulate what Buddhism is not and is and where Western thought is rigid or flexible. There are, he says, many things—the claims of modernists notwithstanding—to which Buddhism cannot be reduced: philosophy, morality, pacifism, atheistic humanism, agnosticism, nihilism, individualism, proto-science, psychology, pure experience, libertarianism, or spirituality. It is a tradition of duplicities and pluralities, involving philosophy and myth and ritual, intellect and body, with tendencies toward both transcendental denial and the affirmation of practices that Faure describes as “superstitious,” “pagan,” and “polytheistic.” The latter are not pejorative terms for him—indeed, they are indices of the multivalence and openness to the transrational—one might say the religiousness—that he sees as a central Buddhist virtue.

Western philosophy, for its part, says Faure, has been overly concerned with a quest for monochromatic truth. It has been blinded to duplicity and complexity by slavish adherence to the laws of contradiction and the excluded middle, and an obsession with universalizing rationality. At the same time, Faure recognizes that many recent Western thinkers have lost faith in absolute truth, and this gives the tradition a new flexibility and openness to other ways, including Buddhism. Yet Faure is no apologist for Buddhism. He is sensitive to the practical and philosophical consequences of misinterpreting the Twofold Truth and other doctrines, which include neglect of morality, unquestioning acceptance of authority, and a repeated tendency to absolutize relative truths.

Faure’s analysis is agile, complex, and perceptive, and his identification of Twofold Truth as a signal Buddhist contribution to philosophical discourse extremely significant. The book is not without weaknesses, though. On the Buddhist side, Faure knows East Asia well, but his presentation of the Indian philosophical tradition is rather sketchy, which is unfortunate, given the wealth of discussion of the Twofold Truth by Nāgārjuna and his successors. Faure also is a bit simplistic in his portrayal of pre-Mahayana Buddhism and perhaps too harsh in his condemnation of modernist interpretations of the nature of Buddhism, which, after all, are part of the ongoing tradition, too. On the Western side, he is prone to familiar and overly broad generalizations about the rigidity of the entire premodern philosophical enterprise, an irony considering his plea for understanding Buddhism as a complex phenomenon. What’s more, his convincing presentation of Buddhism as a multifaceted religion makes me wish he had looked less to Western philosophy and more to theology for comparison. Perhaps, in the system of an Aquinas or al-Ghazzali, he would find a more complex notion of truth and human possibility than among the philosophers that frustrate him so. Nevertheless, *Double Exposure* is a subtle and challenging reflection on both Buddhist and Western culture and thought and should be read by anyone concerned with their encounter in the contemporary world.

ROGER JACKSON, *Carleton College*.