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*Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflection on Realizing a  
More Equitable Global Future*

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*A Review of Valuing Diversity:  
Buddhist Reflection on Realizing a More  
Equitable Global Future*

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*Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflection on Realizing a More Equitable Global Future.* By Peter D. Hershock. Albany: SUNY Press, 2014, vi + 332 pages, ISBN 978-1-4384-4458-1 (paperback), \$29.95.

In *Valuing Diversity*, Peter Hershock delves into a complex and thorough analysis of contemporary issues of poverty, climate change, social inequality, and technology en route to elucidating the causes and conditions that have contributed to the current state of these issues and suggestions for a reorientation of value that could offer the possibility for resolving these predicaments (2). In the course of this analysis, he demonstrates convincingly how a Buddhist envisioning of these predicaments offers a way of articulating alternatives to the limits of those Western philosophies that have been used to define both the roots of contemporary predicaments and the possibilities for moving beyond them. Hershock draws on a handful of key Buddhist concepts, providing a creative yet cogent reading of interdependence and karma primarily to

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add clarity, depth, and sophistication to his argument. These concepts often serve to anchor his articulation of particular points, particularly in cases where his central argument turns on unconventional phrases such as “aporia of difference” (7-8) or “differing-for” others (22), or where he draws a fine distinction between two words that are rarely differentiated, for example: equality and equity, power and strength, or variety and diversity.

Among the themes addressed throughout the book, the most important is the “aporia of difference,” which refers to the need to more deeply acknowledge our differences, while at the same time forging a deeper commitment to a set of shared values. Hershock aims to explicate the reasons why difference has assumed such importance in the world today, for the sake of reconceiving difference away from variety, “a function of relational dynamics” achieved with the existence of different beings, and toward diversity, a “function of relational dynamics” that “signals a distinctive and achieved quality of interaction” (48-49). Another central theme that Hershock develops is the dichotomy of problem-solution and predicament-resolution (19-20; 60-61). Problems can be solved with the correct strategy, whereas predicaments arise from a conflict among sets of values. Unlike solutions to problems, which “involves finding new means to abiding ends” (6), resolution of predicaments involves moving beyond the conflicting values toward a new set of shared values. The centrality of predicament-resolution in the book is that it requires entering into relationships. Not only do the Buddhist concepts of interdependence, karma, and *upāya* (glossed by Hershock as “relational virtuosity”) all coalesce in this emphasis on relationality, but relationality is also the key to achieving “an emancipatory coordination of differences” that leads to the emergence of new “structures of feeling”—relationships in which differences from others allow us to make “beneficial differences for others” (22).

The first chapter introduces most of the Buddhist concepts that Hershock will draw on to further his argument for reconceiving of dif-

ference in terms of equity and diversity. He first argues for a reorientation of our understanding of difference from stasis toward dynamic relationality. Differences do not simply arise contingent on the existence of things; difference is essential to what these things mean. Hershock introduces the idea of nonduality to elaborate on this reorientation, referring specifically to the Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, as well as Fazang's articulation of interdependence. The notions of emptiness and nonduality mean that how we differ *from* others always imply how we differ *for* others. For Hershock, this connection shows how difference imbues our actions with meaning. To this Hershock adds the notion of karma to buttress the importance of Buddhist nonduality in advocating a new orientation toward difference. Karma helps clarify the need to understand the relationship of "values-intention-actions" to our recursive predicaments (236-238).

In the second chapter Hershock distinguishes "variety" and "diversity." Despite the fact that "variety" and "diversity" are commonly viewed as synonymous, he states that they are two distinct "modulations of difference" (48). Variety is a function of difference based on degrees of non-identity between things, diversity "signals a distinctive and achieved quality of interaction" (49). Drawing on the work of David Harvey, Hershock redefines values as occurring as "modalities of appreciation" (57), emerging along "arcs of change" (59). He then states that diversity as a value implies creativity and a commitment to resolving predicaments leading to an increase in mutual cooperation and shared values.

Chapter three takes up the nature of time and change. Hershock begins from the observation that change generates difference. Examining how predicaments can be addressed by changing the direction of change, he critiques the modern Western notion that one can change things while remaining unchanged with the Buddhist position that participating in the changing of things is concomitant with a change in oneself. As part of his overall critique of modern and postmodern approach-

es to engaging social change, Hershock introduces the idea of the logic of oblique differentiation, which he derives from the Chan master Linji's expression "facing the world and going crosswise" (94). The logic of oblique differentiation eschews having to choose between dichotomies, such as the universal spatio-temporal view of modernity or the relativist view of postmodernity. The thrust of this chapter is to illustrate the possibilities opened up by viewing space and time as products of relational differentiation. Modernity seeks change through exerting control over events; postmodernity advocates free choice as a primary factor of change. Hershock argues that a relational view of time encourages contribution over control and commitment over choice. He suggests that focusing on contribution and commitment in changing the way things change leads us further along addressing the aporia of difference that is the key to creating a better future. Chapter four develops the insights on time and change by applying them historiographically. Hershock states that we need a history of difference. Histories should point out connections and relationships that can serve as resources for strengthening and enhancing diversity.

Chapters five and seven provide more focused examples of the conditions that gave rise to current global predicaments, such as the technological reconfiguring of communities and the realignment of the individual with "free variation." Chapter five traces the commodification of difference through an analysis of the rise of mass mediation and associated technology. Hershock compellingly illustrates how the spread of forms of mediation like radio, television, and the internet have allowed for individual identities to be built on the basis of personal choice, without requiring any commitment to the groups or communities with which one identifies. The consumption of media offers "experiential and relational variation, but not diversification" (144). In addition, media consumption takes the reins of one's attention, preventing attention from being given to appreciating diversity. The consequence of this colonization of attention, according to Hershock, is the further perpetuation of variety at the expense of value-enhancing diversity. Similarly, chapter

seven identifies the contemporary focus on variety (at the expense of diversity) as the outcome of currents of thought that he traces back to the stock market crash of 1929 and the Second World War. These currents include postmodernism, free market liberalism, rational choice theory, and the emergence of a risk society. All of these currents have contributed to an “agent-focused virtuality” that characterizes the “hidden agenda” of the “netropolis” (198-200). Although the netropolis highlights difference, in contrast to the unity of the cosmopolis, its aim is merely a push towards free variation, not towards equity-enhancing diversity.

In chapters six and eight, Hershock offers a similar critique of both modern and postmodern ethical theorizing by identifying their failure as rooted in a failure to promote diversity. Neither modern universalism nor postmodern relativism is able to move past acknowledging equality toward creating greater equity. Because equality and equity are, like variety and difference, often used interchangeably, Hershock draws a clear contrast between them. He states that increasing equity is achieved not through greater equality but through greater diversity. This is partially because equality is a function of external relations, identifying what we have in common and using that to address problems of inequality based on standard measures. But solving problems of inequality does not resolve the predicament of arcs of change that negatively affect one’s quality of life and provide one little possibility to alter the direction of such arcs of change. In light of this Hershock defines equity as “the distinctive quality and direction of relationality that occurs when all present in a given situation manifest both *capacities-for and commitments-to furthering their own interests in ways that are deemed valuable by others*” (223, italics in original). The connection between equity and diversity is made clear in chapter nine. Both differ from their alleged synonyms—equality and variety—in the sense that the latter lack relational dynamism. Hershock further links diversity and equity by highlighting the rise of global commons (GCs) and global public goods (GPGs). These concepts reflect the emergence of a shared set of values that arises from

a mutual recognition of predicaments that need resolution and the creative cooperation needed to protect these goods. Another advantage to Hershock's invoking GCs and GPGs is that they accentuate the complex interdependence that resists attempts at solving the problems through establishing a universally applicable ethics that merely recognizes the legitimacy of a variety of unconnected values.

In the final chapter of the book and epilogue, Hershock offers suggestions for what a reorientation of our understanding of difference might look like in practice. As expected, there remains great challenges to bringing forth a global future based on diversity and equity, most notably because, as he mentions, diversification cannot be planned for, but is an improvisational response to predicaments. Nonetheless, Hershock points out two recent phenomena that might come close to the kind of ethical improvisation and relational ontology that mark his vision: the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. Although neither completely embody what Hershock means by the diversification that changes the way things change, both exhibited elements of "structures of feeling," improvisation, and a resistance to the dichotomy of universalism and relativism.

*Valuing Diversity* is a book that offers a way of applying Buddhist ideas to ethics without either seeking to systematize or reduce Buddhist ethics, or arguing for an ethics that is strictly applicable to Buddhists. But Hershock's approach is unique. Instead of applying standard interpretations of Buddhist philosophical concepts to construct what might be a Buddhist response to the issues he discusses, Hershock works with the concepts and, in doing so, provides a fresh insight on current ethical predicaments. But he also offers new readings of traditional terms through a careful adaptation to the issues at hand. Perhaps it is fitting to call Hershock's approach an example of Western Buddhist pragmatism—pragmatism being used in its philosophical sense. But this leads one to wonder where the pragmatists are in the book. Aside from a single reference to William James on page seventy-four, the tradition of pragmatism



is noticeably absent. Hershock does a fine job of employing Buddhist concepts like karma, no-self, *kusala* (which Hershock interprets as “virtuosity-manifesting improvisations”), and interdependence to support his novel interpretations of diversity, equity, and difference (286). But it seems his insistence on the situational, relational nature of global ethics would also be supported by not only thinkers like Rorty, but also, given the numerous references to climate change, by environmental pragmatists such as Bryan Norton.

In addition to this question, one other point in Hershock’s argument deserves mention. In chapter nine he discusses how karma provides insight into how our current situation is understood as the emerging of previous values, intentions, and actions, and changing our present requires dissolving this karma to allow for an alteration of our values, intentions, and actions. He then remarks that dissolving karma is nothing other than realizing no-self (237). If what Hershock is suggesting is that the possibility for enacting the kind of change he envisions is contingent on individual realization of no-self, how many people will need to have such a realization before significant change occurs? It seems obvious that Hershock does not view this realization as something only attained by religious virtuosos. But further explanation of how this realization fits into his overall argument, and whether or not such realization is restricted to Buddhists, would help the reader understand how Hershock sees these kinds of changes coming about.

These questions do not distract from what Hershock has accomplished. *Valuing Diversity* is no doubt a tour-de-force of contemporary philosophy and social theory. It is written in a compelling style, keeping the reader engaged and wanting to see what comes next. Hershock handles a vast array of material with analytical skill and efficiency. The book is a fine example of how Buddhist philosophy can inform an applied ethics approach to a diversity of social issues.