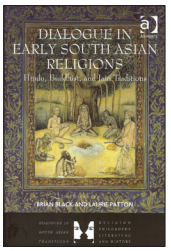

Brian Black and Laurie Patton, eds., *Dialogue in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Traditions*

Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015. 278 pages. Hardcover, $122.00, ISBN: 978-1-4094-4012-3. Paperback, $40.95, ISBN: 978-1-4094-4013-0. eBook, $28.67, ISBN: 9781315576978. doi: 10.4324/9781315576978.

This work, while not technically the first volume to be released in Ashgate's new "Dialogues in South Asian Traditions" series, can nevertheless be taken as its flagship. A product of the Sammukham Project, which held workshops in Chicago in 2008 and Montreal in 2009, this volume collects essays organized around the theme of "dialogue" by eleven scholars of early Indian religions who participated in the workshops. As such, the book displays the typical strengths and weaknesses of edited volumes coming out of conferences. On the one hand, it brings into conversation—dialogue, if you will—a number of scholars whose work might not otherwise be found in the same place, providing a useful space for synergistic comparisons under the rubric of a common theme. On the other hand, the inevitable breadth of the unifying topic means that at times certain contributions can go off in quite tangential directions. In the case of this volume, a key example would be the chapter by Alf Hiltebeitel, whose contribution to the volume's theme at times feels subordinated to Hiltebeitel's career-long argument for the unitary authorship of the Mahābhārata.

The themes of conferences and workshops are often interpreted quite loosely by participants. Black and Patton do an excellent job, however, of providing a coherent framework to the different interpretations of the theme of "dialogue" in the way they

organize the book. They divide the book into three parts, each including contributions that interpret "dialogue" in a particular way. The first part, "Dialogues Inside and Outside the Texts," includes essays that address "dialogue" in the most literal way, that is, actual dialogues between people that take place within early Indian religious texts. This section includes contributions by Laurie Patton on a dialogue between frogs in the *Ṛg Veda*, and Alf Hiltebeitel, Anna Aurelia Esposito, and Naomi Appleton on the use of dialogues as frame narratives in the epics, Jain literature, and Buddhist Jātaka literature, respectively. The second part, "Texts in Dialogue," addresses the way in which texts engage in "dialogue" with one another. It includes contributions by Douglas Osto on the dialogue that the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras implicitly engage in with earlier Buddhist texts, Elizabeth M. Rohlman on intertextual dialogue among the Purāṇas, and Andrew J. Nicholson on the textual genres in which Indian philosophy appears. Finally, the third part, "Moving Between Traditions," explores the textual expressions of dialogues that took place in early South Asia between religious traditions. It includes contributions by Michael Nichols on dialogues between the Buddha and non-Buddhists, Jonathan Geen on dialogues justifying early renunciation in the Jain and Hindu traditions, Lisa Wessman Crothers on royal advising in the *Arthaśāstra* and Buddhist Jātakas, and Brian Black on the comparison of dialogues found in Hindu and Buddhist literature.

I will begin with two criticisms and then address the strengths of the book. The first criticism is relatively minor, but may prove an annoyance to some readers: the type, at least in the paperback version that I reviewed, is far smaller than is typical in academic books. In spite of the fact that I have not yet reached the age where I need reading glasses, I found it difficult to read. My more substantive critique, admittedly based on my own interests in dialogue in early South Asian religions, is that "dialogue" in this volume comes across as remarkably static. With a few notable exceptions, what we often get are "snapshots" of dialogue between characters in texts, between texts themselves, and between religious traditions, rather than a full sense of the *dialectical* and therefore fundamentally transformative nature of dialogue. I would like to have seen a fuller exploration not just of the way in which literary, textual, and institutional agents engage in dialogue, but of *the way in which dialogue brings those agents into being*.

Nevertheless, the creative application of the theme "dialogue" in different ways to the study of early South Asian religions gives us new eyes with which to see the textual traditions of early India and will surely lead to important insights in scholarship to come. All of the contributions to the volume provide the seeds of important insights, some of which—like the contributions of Naomi Appleton on the Jātakas and Brian Black on comparison of Buddhist and Brahmanical dialogues—have already been borne out in their other work. Two contributions that I felt were particularly innovative were those of Andrew Nicholson and Lisa Crothers. In Chapter 7, Nicholson makes the compelling argument that part of the reason that Western philosophers do not recognize Indian philosophy as philosophy is that Indian philosophy retains throughout its history a dialogic format that was once found in ancient Greek philosophy, but has since been abandoned in the professional discipline of philosophy in the West. In Chapter 10, Lisa Crothers engages in a fascinating comparative study of the *Arthaśāstra* and Buddhist Jātakas that explores the different ways in which they deal with the problematic figures of royal advisors and spies. Overall, this volume is the harbinger of exciting work to come—within the "Dialogues in South Asian Tradi-

tions" series, within the individual scholarship of the contributors, and within the field of South Asian religions as a whole.

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