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1500 words

review of

Matthew J. Moore, *Buddhism and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Leigh Jenco, LSE

In this readable book Matthew Moore offers the resources for political theorists to see how their own familiar debates might intersect with, and even benefit from, Buddhist philosophy. Its synthetic approach, lucid writing, and short length (only 145 pages not counting footnotes) suggest that this book would serve well as an undergraduate or graduate text for an introductory course in political theory, and based on the content and organization of the book this seems to be the goal.

The long introductory section and the lack of a coherent argumentative thread mean that the book, while valuable for students, may be less valuable to scholars of Buddhism or to comparative political theorists who already possess basic knowledge of Buddhist ideas. The book draws on an admirably comprehensive and rich set of English-language secondary literature on Buddhist thought, and carefully navigates its way through some key scholarly debates, such as about whether Buddhist ethics is hypothetical rather than categorical. But it does not use its chapters as stepping stones to a larger original intervention in those debates, which—given the relative lack of attention in political theory to this vitally important and globally relevant body of thought—is somewhat disappointing. Only three chapters (out of seven total) attempt an original reading or argument. Of these, one slots Buddhism into a broader discussion of what the author calls “theories of limited citizenship” and spends only four pages discussing Buddhist theories of politics, repeating the basic points made in the introductory section. While this discussion is fascinating in itself, the distinctive contribution of Buddhist ideas here is less than clear; the analysis of limited citizenship could proceed equally well without it. indeed, one gets the impression that the goal is really more to de-exoticize Buddhism by assimilating it to existing political theory categories rather than to . The other two are equally devoted to expositions of familiar thinkers such as Nietzsche and William Connolly much of the time is spent in the This means that readers looking for an innovative approach to existing debates in Buddhist philosophy will likely be disappointed.