With her study alternating between literary case studies and theoretical 'recesses', the architecturality allows her to employ the model of accented reading, which has its roots in her experience of teaching non-Native writers of the English language, using texts prescribed in the syllabi of American universities. The text itself reads with accent: with a mixture of close analysis and anecdote, presented, for the most part, in the first-person plural, it pays homage to a reading that is not intent on pushing the accent to the background while ploughing through the chunkier sections of the text. The fact that the text itself resists such a reading highlights its commitment to the method outlined by Srinivasan. In the same stroke, the text archives accessibility, keeping its register open to students and researchers. Srinivasan's exercise in accented reading is in line with the interdisciplinary turn to "accent," something she previously dealt with in her co-edited volume *Thinking with an Accent: Toward a New Object, Method, and Practice* (2023). By considering major literary figures, Srinivasan points out their tendency to flatten their identity into self-inflicted assimilation that determines both how they write and how they are read by Western readers as well as the (often) marginal, postcolonial reader. *Overdetermined* can be summed up (at the risk of oversimplification) as a study that depicts how identity is inescapably (over)determined by accent, revealing broader power dynamics as it "offers a metacritical analysis of the pedagogy of Indian English literature in U.S. academe".

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THE PROBLEM OF GOD IN BUDDHISM. By Signe Cohen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025. 74 pp.

Cohen's *The Problem of God in Buddhism* presents an insightful exploration into a paradoxical and fascinating aspect of Buddhist tradition, its relationship with divinity and the concept of God. As a part of the *Elements in the Problems of God* series edited by Michael L. Peterson, Cohen succinctly and comprehensively offer a profound exploration of Buddhism's complex relationship with the concept of divinity through a navigation of the nuanced theological terrain of Buddhist thought and addressing whether Buddhism can be classified as an atheistic religion, a spiritual philosophy, or something entirely distinct.

Cohen begins by situating Buddhism within its historical and philosophical context, tracing its origins to Siddhattha Gotama, the 5th-century BCE prince who became the Buddha, or "The Awakened One" (1). She outlines the core of Buddhist soteriology through the Four Noble Truths, which diagnose the human condition as one of dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) rooted in desire (*taṇhā*). As Cohen notes, "The four noble truths are not articles of faith in Buddhism, but, rather, from the Buddhist perspective, a prescription to cure the suffering of the world" (4). This medical analogy of likening the Buddha's teachings to a physician's diagnosis and remedy reinforces Cohen's argument that Buddhism adopts a pragmatic approach to alleviating suffering without reliance on divine intervention. She deepens this point by invoking a classical Buddhist thought: "When a person is struck by an arrow, the Buddha suggests, the important thing is to remove the arrow and alleviate his suffering, rather than worry about where exactly the arrow came from" (4).

One of the key themes of Cohen's analysis is Buddhism's rejection of an eternal self (*ātman*) and a creator god (*Īśvara*), which are concepts that are central to theistic traditions like Hinduism. She explains that Buddhist philosophy posits all phenomena, including humans, as impermanent aggregates (*khandhas*) of psycho-physical atoms (*dhammas*), "There is nothing eternal, insists Buddhism – not the self, and not even gods" (5). Deities such as *devas* and *brahmās*, while present in Buddhist cosmology, are impermanent beings trapped in the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Cohen vividly illustrates their

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transient nature, "Gods will die when they have run out of their allotted life spans, or even because they forget to eat" (35). Cohen skillfully confronts the paradox inherent in labeling Buddhism an "atheistic religion." She carefully dissects Buddhism's rejection of a supreme, eternal, creator deity, highlighting the Buddhist critique that "an eternal God who is the first cause of all things goes against the grain of Buddhism" due to Buddhism's emphasis on impermanence and cyclical causation (15). Cohen further presents Buddhism's intriguing stance toward gods as entities, though acknowledged and sometimes revered, lack permanence, ultimate authority, or salvific power. Her portrayal of Buddhist deities (*devas*) as impermanent and even suffering beings themselves vividly conveys Buddhism's fundamental teaching of impermanence and the universal inevitability of dissatisfaction.

Nevertheless, Cohen adds an important caveat, opining that Buddhism's rejection of an omnipotent creator does not equate to a wholesale materialism. In her assertion, Buddhism accommodates a sacred dimension beyond mundane sensory reality, seen notably in the concept of *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) which is the ultimate liberation from suffering. Cohen clarifies that *nibbāna* is neither a place nor a traditional divine realm but rather a profound existential state free from suffering and the illusion of selfhood. Her analysis captures the subtlety and complexity of Buddhist soteriology, as she writes: "While *nibbāna* is described as the highest bliss in Buddhist texts, it is an experience without the illusion of an experiencer" (25). One of Cohen's most valuable contributions is her exploration of the Buddhist approach to salvation and the role of enlightened beings like buddhas and bodhisattvas. She articulates well the paradoxical role of these beings who, while not divine creators or rulers, function as inspirational and practical agents of salvation. Cohen presents these complexities by highlighting *Mahāyāna* Buddhism's acceptance of "extraordinary beings…[who] can function as saviors" (23) without equating them with theistic gods. This distinction does enrich one's understanding of Buddhism's spiritual landscape as distinctively human-centered although cosmologically nuanced.

The book further investigates regional Buddhist practices, demonstrating how local deities and folk beliefs have been absorbed into Buddhism without fundamentally altering its anti-theistic core. Cohen effectively illustrates how Buddhism adapts deities as beings who are themselves bound to the karmic cycle and seeking enlightenment alongside human devotees. She launches into an examination of popular Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Japan which significantly enhances readers' appreciation of Buddhism's cultural adaptability and theological fluidity. In the final chapter, Cohen thoughtfully engages the debate regarding Buddhism's classification as a religion. Invoking Durkheim and Eliade's definitions, she convincingly positions Buddhism as a religious tradition due to its veneration of the sacred, albeit not personalized in a theistic deity but rather embodied in the abstract ideal of *nibbāna* and the symbolic veneration of enlightened beings, sacred texts, relics, and ethical teachings. Her argument deftly expands the scholarly discourse about what constitutes religion itself and challenges the Western-centric boundaries often imposed on non-theistic spiritual traditions.

If one were to critique Cohen's succinct yet insightful exploration, it could perhaps be the brevity inherent in the format, although this itself is understandably shaped and constrained by the *Elements* series format and its monograph scope. This succinctness, however, occasionally precludes a deeper exploration of certain philosophical nuances, such as comparative analyses between Buddhist conceptions and Western theological paradigms or fuller treatment of divergences within Buddhism's varied traditions. However, this minor limitation is offset by Cohen's remarkable clarity, conciseness, and intellectual precision.

The Problem of God in Buddhism is undeniably a highly readable, intellectually stimulating, and philosophically rigorous work that intellectually captures Buddhism's complex stance toward divinity and the sacred. With the offered fresh and intriguing perspectives that challenge conventional Western theological assumptions, scholars and students interested in comparative religion, Buddhist studies, and philosophical theology will find this monograph both enlightening and essential.

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