Charles R. Strain

The Prophet and the Bodhisattva: Daniel Berrigan, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Ethics of Peace and Justice. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014. Pp. ix + 276. Pb, \$32.

The Prophet and the Bodhisattva is an ambitious, engaging, and original work. It combines elements of narrative ethics, virtue ethics, social ethics, ecological ethics, religious ethics, liberation theology, political theology, Catholic social thought, social critique, and models of justice into “a theory and praxis of social change” (247). The book takes Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh as highly developed, living embodiments of critically engaged, socially concerned, non-violent moral and religious self-transcendence and uses their social and ethical visions as the springboard for formulating a new social ethics. Berrigan, a Jesuit, died earlier this year, and Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist.

If *Prophet's* combination of such diverse elements is almost always suggestive and insightful, it is not always seamlessly coherent. That is not surprising. The book draws on a mélange of modes and models of ethics and justice, and in any case contemporary ethics itself is hardly a model of clarity, consistency, and coherence. Full coherence in any science or discipline is a late achievement made possible by earlier exercises of creative and intelligent thinking, not vice versa.

Prophet is a creative, intelligent, and intensive exploration of issues such as the role of attention and compassion in ethical theory and practice, the limitations of liberal individualism, the virtues of community building, the pathologies of power and empire, the horrors of structural violence, the cultivation of countervailing institutions, and sustained resistance to the many forms of oppression and domination. It is a concrete and heuristic inquiry, not a finished treatise. It bristles with, but does not fully address, larger questions of method in the human sciences, ethics, and justice studies.

The book's seven chapters (excluding its introduction and conclusion) fall into three parts. Part One presents two diptychs. The first describes two related and paradigmatic types of religious and ethical practice. These types are, roughly, prophetic Judeo-Christianity and socially engaged Buddhism, the prophet and the *bodhisattva*, representing respectively the demand for justice in response to palpable injustice and the cultivation of compassion in response to universal suffering. The second diptych presents Berrigan and Nhat Hanh as “living exemplars” (8) of these types of religious and ethical practice. Part Two's three chapters bring the foundation developed in Part One into dialogue with the tradition (or rather, three traditions) of social ethics. Finally, the

two chapters of Part Three apply the social ethics developed in Part Two to the problems of imperialism and militarism on the one hand and environmental justice and climate change on the other.

Prophet is most original and penetrating as a reflective and refreshing alternative to the staid and desiccated ethics dominant in the academic world. The first two chapters primarily employ biographic description and evocative narrative to depict the exemplary lives and moral visions of Berrigan and Nhat Hanh. Humans initially apprehend the good on a preconceptual level, in self-transcending feelings of admiration; we naturally resonate with what Bernard Lonergan called “incarnate” meaning and value (see *Method in Theology* [New York: Seabury, 1979], 73). *Prophet* skillfully exploits this dynamic. It also attempts to build tentative bridges to systematic ethical theories such as Martha Nussbaum’s work in virtue ethics and her more recent efforts in *Creating Capabilities* and *Frontiers of Justice* (97–101, 133–65)—not always successfully, in my view.

One might be tempted to think of *Prophet*, on one level, as an updated version of the classical genres of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric, that is, the skilled and evocative use of praise and blame for the purpose of modeling moral or religious excellence and inspiring imitation of exemplary persons. Berrigan and Nhat Hanh become “exemplars” of moral struggle (3, 8, 84, 251), elders of meaning, compassion, and holiness, “modern embodiments of classic forms of moral life and agency” (3). Their lives and writings speak more deeply and poignantly about human striving toward the good than cartloads of standard-issue textbooks on ethics. On this level, *Prophet* stands in a long line of predecessors, including Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*—here Christian and Buddhist rather than Greek and Roman—the *Imitation of Christ*, Ignatius’s *Acta*, and a host of other works.

This approach allows the book to transpose classical virtue ethics into a more modern and pluralistic key, at least potentially. Strain characterizes Berrigan and Nhat Hanh as “moral classics” (251) by analogy to the enduring depth of classical texts. As Friedrich Schlegel remarked: “A classical work of literature is one that can never be completely understood. But it must also be one from which those who are educated and educating themselves must always desire to learn more” (quoted in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall [New York: Crossroads, 1992], 290, n. 218.).

This is not far from Aristotle’s strategy in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Aristotelian and Thomistic account of moral excellences modulates into the key of compassion-grounded spirituality of the Buddhist variety and spiritually grounded activism of the prophetic Christian variety. *Prophet* takes Berrigan and Nhat Hanh as modern or postmodern *spoudaioi* and *phronimoi*—the

models or types of well-developed persons forming the quasi-empirical basis of Aristotle's *Ethics* (see, e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b24–25; 113a24–34; 1166a17). This approach can endow virtue ethics with a freshness and an appeal to modern audiences that it might otherwise lack. *Prophet* devotes less effort to transposing the Aristotelian dianoetic virtues (or “intellectual excellences”), although it implicitly invites “mindfulness” meditation to audition for the role played in classical ethics by *phronesis*, or concrete, practical wisdom oriented by effective self-knowledge.

Prophet may also be viewed as a propaedeutic to a new (or rather, renewed) Christian social ethics. In part, Strain centers ethics on disciplined and sustained attentiveness (“mindfulness”) and compassion. This is not entirely new, of course. From the “sch'ma O Israel” of the Deuteronomist, through the silent, contemplative prayer of the mystical tradition, to the enduring influence of Jean Pierre de Caussade's sacrament of the present moment, Judeo-Christianity has always to some degree attended to attentiveness. But for reasons I cannot fathom, formal ethics tends to think of attentiveness, when it thinks of it at all, as a precondition of ethical behavior rather than a central form of ethical practice.

Prophet rightly regards attentiveness (mindfulness) as a foundational component in ethics. The “classic lives” of Berrigan and Nhat Hanh disclose, as well, the longitudinal and spiritual dimensions of developed and sharpened attentiveness, drawing needed attention on the reader's part to what used to be called “formation.” A properly articulated social ethics is not abstractly axiomatic. It is, instead, embedded in the practices of those communities of conviction and commitment within which alone adequate formation for faith, compassion, and justice can take place.

Prophet's last two chapters flow in part from prior chapters and are rich in description and critique. But one senses a discontinuity as well. Imperialism, militarism, and global warming may be diagnosed with relative ease as detrimental to the human good. But they are immensely complex and convoluted realities. Their putative causes and cures are deeply contested, and the resulting oppositions ramify into larger economic disputes, political disputes, intra-scientific disputes, and extra-scientific policy disputes. Only an elaborate and dialectical method could hope to sort such a tangled skein. But that would call for another volume altogether.

Patrick D. Brown

Seattle University

brownp@seattleu.edu

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