

# Book Review

*THE PSYCHOLOGY OF NIRVANA.*

By *Rune Johansson.*

(Allen and Unwin. 35s.).

Review by J. C. COOPER.

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While Professor Johansson agrees with de la Vallée Poussin that too much has been written about Nirvana, he maintains that this "too much" is also too superficial and based on inadequate investigation and, therefore, he sets out to "collect and describe all the evidence as objectively as possible", without forcing any extraneous explanations upon it, though, admittedly, approaching it from a mainly psychological viewpoint. This he justifies by the fact that the Pali Nikayas are rich in psychological terminology and analyses, and, since all serious study should be helpful, psychology should contribute its share. He states at the outset that his methods are "psychological and semantic, rather than historical and philosophical".

The investigation is limited to the five Nikayas; to understanding and establishing them as a comprehensive whole, and to studying the question whether Nirvana is a psychological, ethical, or metaphysical state, or a combination of them all. Groups of verbs are taken from the Nikayas to show that Nirvana "can be an object of knowledge and vision, feelings, desire, approach, acquisition and production". A distinction is made between emotions and feelings; the latter are defined as "the experiences of pleasure or discomfort that normally accompany our perceptions and other conscious processes". These may become strong under pressure, but emotion is "a state of imbalance such as anger, hate, fear, anxiety, elation and love", so that the state of the arahant is one of calm in which feelings are experienced without emotional reaction. Although Nirvana is a state of freedom from needs, emotions and all sensuality, it is also a state brought about by transformation of *citta*, "the core of personality", defined as a combination of mind and personality, the change taking place through practical and intellectual effort,—a causal process.

The author queries a later trend in Buddhism to define Nirvana as a metaphysical state transcending time, space and causality, "a supra-mundane reality, with independent existence", attained by merging into this reality, and suggests that the terms *ajatam*, *amatam*, *akatam*, *asankhatam*, usually translated "unborn, deathless, unmade, uncompounded", are more correctly rendered "freedom from birth, freedom from death, freedom from creation, freedom from putting together". If this were correct it would "set us back to the personal plane with which discussions of Nirvana are usually concerned".